An Evolving Trade?
Male Sex Work and the Internet

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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Signed:  

Andrew McLean

Date: 11/02/2013
Acknowledgements

As anyone who has undertaken a research degree might tell you, the task of planning, researching, and writing a thesis is plagued with the potentiality for mishaps, confusion, self-doubt and anxiety. While I have experienced my fair share of these states of being, it is with great relief that I may now objectively examine the journey I have undertaken and see the proverbial silver linings amongst what were some rather ominous-looking clouds. This piece of research represents much of what I wanted to achieve several years ago. It is my hope that this project stands as a sound contribution to understanding the experiences of a group of people who are so frequently defined by the stigma attached to their profession as opposed to the merits of their person.

While the road may have been rocky for me at times, the road is often rocky, emotionally and psychologically complicated (and even potentially physically dangerous) for some of those whose experiences I relate herein. Without painting the individuals concerned as victims in any way – indeed, this is a most inappropriate word to describe a group more economically and socially powerful in relation to many other groups – the exchange of sexual services for money is not an activity devoid of a certain level of risk and adversity. I owe the 24 men who allowed me to ask highly personal questions for the sake of social science a large amount of gratitude. The trust, candour and self-awareness they displayed in divulging highly sensitive information to this researcher – information that had in some cases never before been shared with another – was truly appreciated. I truly hope that some of the recommendations I have put forward to assist this population are taken into account by ‘the powers that be’ in the interests of developing the most just, equitable and progressive working conditions possible for sex workers (male or otherwise).

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List of acronyms

**AIDS** – Acquired Immuno-deficiency Syndrome

**BDSM** – Bondage, Discipline and Sado-Masochism

**BBV** – Blood-borne virus

**BLA** – Business Licensing Authority

**BMSW** – Brothel-based male sex work

**CAV** – Consumer Affairs Victoria

**GLBTIQ** – Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer

**HIV** – Human Immuno-deficiency Virus

**HRESC** – Human Research Ethics Sub-Committee

**HSM** – High self-monitor

**IMSW** – Internet-based male sex work

**LSM** – Low self-monitor

**MSM** – Men who have sex with men

**MSW** – Male sex work

**PCA number** – Prostitution Control Act number

**PCV** – Prostitutes Collective of Victoria

**PLS** – Plain Language Statement

**RhED** – Resourcing Health and Education in the Sex Industry

**SMSW** – Street-based male sex work

**SOPV** – Sex on premises venue

**STI** – Sexually transmitted infection

**SWA number** – Sex Work Act number

**SWOP** – Sex Worker Outreach Project

**SIN** – Sex Industry Network

**VAC** - Victorian AIDS Council
Abstract

This investigation into the online male sex trade in Melbourne explores the Internet’s rise in popularity as a marketplace for male sex workers (MSWs). It examines the ways in which clients and workers engage with the Internet, as well as the effect(s) of this new domain upon workers and their professional encounters. The study finds that engaging in sex work is a common experience for young, attractive gay men, with many opting to offer their services (illegally) online in favour of more traditional sites (e.g. street, brothel/agency and print) due to a number of perceived advantages - such as anonymity, convenience and greater economic rewards. In turn, clients of MSWs also prefer to use the Internet for reasons pertaining to privacy and convenience. The marketing strategies employed by MSWs widely exploit stereotypes associated with (gay) masculinity in a market where visual representations of sexuality are of paramount importance. The study examines workers’ perceptions of success. Many associate long-term success in the industry with an ability to self-monitor, allowing for the maintenance of a wealthy client base. Finally, the study investigates the key legislative and social issues that may complicate the working and personal lives of Internet-based male sex workers (IMSWs).
Introduction

This thesis seeks to shed some light upon a subject that, paradoxically, is both clandestine and commonplace. While the majority of policy makers, news providers and academics treat male sex work (MSW) as a fringe issue, the gay community has long understood its ubiquity. Thus, it is the experiences and insights of this group that inform the conclusions of this project. Male sex work is an issue that has increasingly (yet slowly) attracted the attention of researchers, with a considerable focus maintained upon the activities and behaviours of street-based workers. Yet a new and powerful medium has arisen in the past two decades whereby sex workers of all genders can now be found: the Internet. The Internet has revolutionised and reconfigured almost every aspect of our lives, and the (male) sex industry is no exception.

This research project was borne out of a deep fascination with the rationales of individuals involved in the business of selling sex. I explicitly acknowledge the influence of a recent study, the SHANTUSI project (Rowe 2011a), in which I served as a research assistant. The project was funded by the Department of Human Services and undertaken on behalf of Inner South Community Health Services, or more specifically RhED (Resourcing Health and Education in the Sex Industry), which is the Victorian sex workers’ representative organisation managed by the community health service. The SHANTUSI project documented the personal experiences and needs of Melbourne-based male (and female and transgender) sex workers. My research expands upon this knowledge by investigating Melbourne-based MSWs specifically operating via the Internet.

Prior to the work carried out by Rowe and myself in the SHANTUSI project and this thesis, a detailed investigation of the Melbourne-based male sex industry did not exist. This lack of understanding of the size or activities of the MSW population provided ample motivation to conduct my research. Only two Australian-based academics, Garrett Prestage and Victor Minichiello, have been particularly proactive in researching MSW prior to SHANTUSI. Their foundational work informs the focus of this project. Unfortunately, despite Prestage and Minichiello’s contributions, there remains a dearth of research in regard to this population, the approximate and ever-changing size of which we can only but guess at any point in time. Put simply, beyond the expertise of frontline local services and a narrow strand of academic research, we don’t know much about MSWs given that analysis and investigation of this group
is usually neglected in favour of studying their more topical, visible and thus research accessible female counterparts, typically via a feminist framework of some kind\(^1\).

This simple acknowledgment of the lack of information concerning this group of individuals provides a starting point. There is a need for answers to general questions that examine the dynamic relationships between MSWs, clients, and the technological power of the Internet. My research asks:

- How and why has the Internet arisen as the dominant medium for men selling sex in Melbourne?
- How do MSWs in Melbourne use the Internet to advertise and to secure clients, and how receptive is their client base to such strategies?
- What does it mean to be successful in the online industry? What approaches are taken by MSWs in developing sound business acumen?
- What issues and concerns exist among MSWs in Melbourne operating via the Internet? What are the consequences associated with working via this medium?

This project seeks to understand the many ways in which the male sex industry has been transformed by the Internet, and to appreciate that there are unique consequences (both positive and negative) for individuals involved in this avenue of sex work\(^2\).

The first chapter takes the form of a literature review. It investigates the primary paradigms that have informed past research agendas – those of psychopathology, typologies and epidemiology. The chapter examines the contributions of Prestage and Minichiello, as well as research teams and individuals tapping into the activities of MSWs operating online in other Western nations.

\(^1\) Such frameworks, particularly in respect of radical feminist theorising, often neglect to examine the role of male and transgender sex work and also fail to consider gay male theory (Altman 2001). They instead focus on the unequal power dynamics between female workers and male clients. Clearly, such frameworks cannot be applied to commercial sexual activity between men, and the topic is conveniently avoided, save for isolated exceptions (e.g. Jeffreys 1997).

\(^2\) It should also be noted for practical purposes that sex work is defined in this thesis as the physical exchange of sexual services (i.e. sexual acts – oral and anal sex, manual stimulation or ‘handjobs’, erotic massage, fetishes etc.), and excludes other individuals working in the broader sex industry such as strippers, web cam/peep shows, phone sex operators, pornographic actors, etc. Although the Internet has altered these other forms of sex work in certain ways, notions of personal and professional identity are a key focus of this thesis and these can be more readily explored via individuals engaging in sex work as a profession.
Chapter Two is brief, and explains the methodology that brought this research into being. It outlines the expected procedures and processes associated with qualitative research of this kind.

The third chapter defines the extent of gay (and heterosexual) male involvement in MSW. It introduces the notion of a technologically literate sex worker population and charts the nature and size of the male sex industry in Melbourne. The chapter investigates the pitfalls associated with more traditional forms of sex work, before examining the reasons for the Internet’s popularity as a working medium for local MSWs. Evidence presented in this chapter demonstrates plentiful advantages for the online model, including ease, convenience, autonomy, (perceived) safety and increased economic rewards. Selling sex in cyberspace, the evidence suggests, affords individuals luxuries that past generations of sex workers simply have never enjoyed. It puts them in touch with a client base engaged with technology for similar reasons (such as the ability to conduct business from home) and enables MSWs to work within self-defined parameters.

The fourth chapter examines how male sex workers use the Internet to sell their services and how clients respond to these endeavours. The evidence shows that the Internet affords sex workers the freedom to approach their marketing practices in a variety of ways, including the employment of stereotypical masculine sexual imagery. Many MSWs create an elaborate online presence, yet much of this effort appears redundant in practice, as clients prefer to focus solely on the hyper-sexual images in place of a worker’s persona. Throughout the chapter, the development of a personal brand and online persona is treated as a fluid and dynamic process, involving interaction and feedback between clients and workers. This process allows for a level of diversity in the online MSW marketplace not found in other forms of sex work, even if this diversity is not fully appreciated or recognised by certain sectors of the client base.

Chapter Five investigates success in the industry, and outlines tactics employed by workers ‘offline’, beyond their advertising, in order to secure a long-term client base. The chapter provides an inventory of such tactics including: the active construction of sex work as a ‘business’; the use of clothing and props in encounters; refraining from ‘clockwatching’; maintaining a focus on relationship building; and the setting of personal boundaries. Drawing upon Snyder’s (1974) theory of ‘self-monitoring’, the chapter argues that workers who are able
to adapt to client tastes and expectations are more likely to maintain a long-term (and expectantly wealthy) client base – the key to ‘success’ in the industry as defined by participants. The chapter concludes with a case study of a MSW whose circumstances provide an intentionally dubious example of success in the industry.

The sixth and final chapter in this thesis investigates the consequences for MSWs who embrace the online model. It explores issues of justice within the present legislative frameworks, and the potential of applicable laws to cause unintended problems for workers with regard to their privacy and earning potential, and to create anxiety over their levels of compliance with onerous regulations. The chapter investigates issues of isolation, with evidence that the solitary nature of online work removes Internet-based male sex workers (IMSWs) from the established support networks of their fellow workers and external services. Other issues inherent to sex work, such as threats to personal safety, stigma management, psychosexual issues and problematic drug use, remain outside of the Internet’s sphere of influence.

To summarise, this thesis argues that the scope and structure of the Melbourne-based male sex industry have changed drastically. The Internet has transfigured this realm and removed some of the inconveniences associated with sex work, simultaneously redefining success for workers and increasing its rewards, while creating a new set of problems and issues unique to this medium.
Chapter One:

Literature review

‘Popular images of the male prostitute are confused and often contradictory, poorly informed and often more concerned with moral condemnation than humane understanding’ (West & de Villiers 1992: ix).

1.1 A review of dominant research frameworks

Although researchers have not entirely ignored the existence of male sex workers, certain aspects of their experience have been overlooked or under-explored. Male sex workers have consistently received less attention than their (often more visible) female counterparts, particularly in the case of street-based female sex workers. This review of the existing research literature conducted in relation to the characteristics and activities of men involved in sex work provides a succinct historical and sociological overview of the subject matter, and also a platform upon which to highlight inconsistencies and inadequacies within this body of research. By doing so, the necessity of new directions in this field of research will become apparent. It is my intention to emphasise the tendency of researchers to operate within three dominant frameworks - those of psychopathology, typologies, and epidemiology. Investment in these frameworks has resulted in a lack of understanding with regards to the more personal aspects of male sex workers’ experience. Furthermore, I consider it important to acknowledge the workers’ agency in choosing and adapting to new technological influences (i.e. the Internet) in their professional lives.

David Bimbi (2007) provides an excellent account of the research questions that have framed the study of MSWs over the years. He identifies three key paradigms at play. These provide the framework that informs the scope of this review. Firstly, Bimbi points to the initial paradigms of psychopathology and the compulsion to classify ‘types’ of MSWs. This is followed by research underpinned by a public health agenda that focuses on MSWs as potential vectors of disease. In the last two decades of literature, Bimbi identifies a discourse which seeks to understand the personal lives and motivations of MSWs via qualitative methodologies. More recently, the activities of IMSWs have attracted the attention of researchers.
1.2 Psychopathological representations of MSWs

Early research into the behaviours and lives of male sex workers reflect the prevailing discriminatory attitudes towards homosexual men at the time of writing, and such attitudes appear central in the development of stereotypes of male "prostitutes" as psychopathological. Among the first of the scientific accounts of male 'prostitution' was that provided by Freyhan (1947, cited in Bimbi 2007: 12), which takes the form of a case study detailing the arrest of a man for soliciting other men for the purpose of commercial sexual activity. Freyhan observes that his subject participated in homosexual sex voluntarily and without remorse. On the strength of this, Freyhan diagnoses the ‘deviant’ as psychopathic and recommends a lobotomy.

In another 1947 publication, Butts (cited in Bimbi 2007: 12 and Scott 2003: 185) conducted qualitative interviews with a group of 26 street-based male sex workers (SMSWs). Compared with Freyhan's singular case study, Butts' sample represents a large scientific stride. Scott (2003) argues that Butts made a significant contribution to this field of research by distinguishing homosexuality and male sex work, without conflating the two. This opened the door for the modern understanding of fluid sexualities within the realm of MSW. Bimbi (2007) is critical of Butts, unimpressed with his characterisation of the 26 young men not as providers of an illicit service, but as victims of the deviant practices of older homosexual men. The shift in understanding visible in Butts' work is significant nonetheless, as the identification of MSWs as heterosexual and/or homosexual contributed to the development of investigative frameworks concerned with typologies of MSWs. In other words, it became ‘possible to speak not only of “male prostitutes”, but also of specific “types” of male prostitute’ (Scott 2003: 187).

Simultaneously, as Bimbi points out, the irony remains that the majority of early research focuses on ‘deviant’ and ‘heterosexual’ men engaging in MSW and their motivations for doing so, despite the fact that homosexuality was heavily stigmatised and regarded as a mental illness (and could have allowed researchers to scapegoat self-identifying homosexual MSWs on this basis).

Coombs’ 1974 study of 41 street workers (cited in Bimbi 2007: 14) perpetuates the mistaken belief (as demonstrated in the third chapter of this thesis) that the majority of MSWs are heterosexual men. His study finds that the men in his sample suffered a rate of adolescent

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3 See section 1.5 for an analysis of the ‘prostitution vs. sex work’ discourse.

4 While I have undertaken an extensive search for these next few older studies, I have been unable to find the original sources and must rely on citing them through the work of other researchers.
‘homosexual seduction’ with a monetary reward significantly higher than the general population\(^5\). This, he argues, served as a precursor to their involvement in sex work later on in life. Coombs went so far as to articulate a single, universal profile of ‘the’ MSW. The Coombs MSW is:

[B]etween 15 and 23 years old; is unemployed; has dress, gesture, and behaviour that are exaggeratedly male; has a poor work history; is of low to average intelligence; is from a deprived socioeconomic background; is of below-average educational attainment; is a school dropout; and is from a broken home with poor parent models, a dearth of warmth, and an excess of violence and rejection (cited in Allen 1980: 400).

Such attempts to narrowly define MSWs are common in earlier studies; a phenomenon that, while recognising the subjective similarities that do exist among MSWs, this thesis actively seeks to avoid. In a 1976 publication, Coombs elaborates on his findings with the help of his colleague Caukins. To the list of MSW attributes, Coombs and Caukins add immaturity, self destruction and a lack of judgement (cited in West & de Villiers 1992: xiii). There are many more examples of early research seeking to characterise MSWs as anomalous and maladjusted (and primarily heterosexual) beings. These sources have been reviewed extensively by other researchers (Bimbi 2007; Browne & Minichiello 1996; Earls & David 1989; Scott 2003; West & de Villiers 1992) and deserve no more attention.

1.3 Typologies in MSW research

Along with the framework of psychopathology came efforts to categorise MSWs and provide a profile or typology of the male ‘prostitute’. As van der Poel (1992) notes, many researchers have attempted to explain the very existence of the male sex industry by examining the psychosocial characteristics of those involved. This approach has been problematised by Earls and David (1989), who argue that family background and experiences (i.e. psychosocial development) are likely to be less pivotal to a man’s involvement in sex work than sexual orientation, early sexual experience and pragmatic factors such as financial need (a claim which is, with the exception of early sexual experience, supported in this thesis). The first attempt at categorisation was undertaken by Raven in 1960 during his research into MSWs in London, many of whom were working on a part-time basis. He grouped the men into four clusters:

\(^5\) This assumptive correlation between sexual abuse and subsequent involvement in sex work has been debunked by, among others, West and de Villiers, who found little support for ‘the hypothesis that boys learn through early abuse the power of their sexuality for material exploitation’ (1992: 37).
1. Men of the armed services (primarily heterosexual or bisexual) or employed homosexuals in need of money;

2. Low-intelligence drifters who resent the rich and may assault or steal from them;

3. The smart, small-time crook who sees the homosexual as an easy mark; and

4. The full-time professional who is described as witty, verbal, knowledgeable, and in possession of inexhaustible techniques (cited in Snell 1995: 8).

Gandy’s 1971 work increased the number of categories from four to six. These were not much different to those put forward by Raven a decade earlier, consisting of: ‘hoodlum hustlers’ (heterosexual delinquents); ‘professional hustlers’ (full-time SMSWs); ‘transvestite hustlers’; ‘students and the regularly employed’; ‘discharged servicemen’ and lastly, with a strong sense of pathologisation, ‘the rural personality hustler, characterized by naïveté, serious emotional problems, and/or retardation’ (cited in Snell 1995: 7).

Another ten years saw Allen (1980) return the number of categories to four with his qualitative study of 128 men in the United States. Allen’s key groups of male ‘prostitutes’ include full-time street and bar hustlers; full-time call boys or kept boys; part-time hustlers (students and the unemployed) and ‘peer delinquents’. To his credit, Allen highlighted the diversity of experience among his participants, with ‘the only common denominator … [being] that they entered into a sexual relationship with another person in return for money’ (1980: 404). With this assertion, Allen dismisses claims made by the likes of Coombs (1974) and Frayhan (1947) that a single profile of ‘the’ MSW is either valid or feasible.

Instances where MSWs are classified into groups have also occurred outside of a Western context. Liguori and Aggleton (1999) focus on two contrasting types of MSWs in Mexico; travesties, or transgender sex workers, and masajistas (men who work as masseurs in public baths and saunas). The differentiation between these groups is based upon gender identity, a factor that warrants entirely separate analysis as has been justified elsewhere (McLean 2009; Perkins 1983; Perkins, Griffin & Jakobsen 1994; Rowe 2006). The body of research indicates little doubt that travesties would be resentful of the authors’ grouping of two deliberately separate populations under the single banner of MSWs, regardless of the authors’ acknowledgement that their experiences are distinct.

Notions of delinquency and deviance permeate early studies of male sex work, with the ‘male hustler… often depicted as predatory and violent’ (Altman 2001: 110). Implicit assumptions regarding the relationship between the site of work and sexuality have also played a role in
categorising individuals. As noted by Scott (2005a: 188), men providing sexual services in public places (e.g. the street) are usually portrayed as masculine/heterosexual, while those in private spaces (e.g. brothels/advertising) are presented as effeminate/homosexual. Similar associations between site of employment and sexual orientation and identity are visible in the attitudes of the private/IMSWs working today, whose accounts comprise sections of this thesis (although given only one SMSW was interviewed, corresponding conclusions cannot be drawn on this basis).

The characterisation of MSWs as ‘delinquent’ or abnormal in the studies above, and the emphasis on their psychopathology, has built, reinforced and spread a ‘deviant’ stereotype for MSWs. Further, the above research focuses narrowly on street-based workers, a population with characteristics that over-represent the incidence of behaviours that adherents to dominant community norms judge ‘delinquency’. Visible and accessible though they are, neither male, female nor transgender street workers represent the greatest proportion of individuals engaged in sex work (Rowe 2006; Sanders, O’Neill & Pitcher 2009; Weitzer 2005). Given the skewed view created by the vast majority of studies having sampled street-based male sex workers located within a context of disadvantage - for example, living in a homeless subculture often characterised by illicit activity geared towards survival (e.g. Johnson, Gronda & Coutts 2008) - this hardly seems surprising.

Most of the studies reviewed in this chapter were conducted at a time when the Internet, let alone its potential as a marketplace for male sex work, remained beyond imagination. Still, it may have been more useful for past researchers to have attempted to locate men working in brothels and agencies (as noted by Allen 1980). More importantly: for the purposes of this research, past studies reveal nothing about the manner in which the participants saw themselves. Instead their identities are confiscated to be categorised and defined at the whim of the researcher.

Michel Dorais’ 2005 book Rent Boys: The World of Male Sex Trade Workers provides one of the few contemporary qualitative insights into the lives of MSWs. The book is reliant upon categorisation, demonstrating that this framework is still used in some instances today6 in researchers’ attempts to understand the social world of MSWs. From a sample of 40 Canadian men engaged in the business of selling sex, Dorais identifies four ‘life patterns’ to describe the diverse ways in which MSWs enter the industry and conduct themselves within and outside of it.

6 Certain categories articulated by Dorais mirror those used by Raven fifty years ago – e.g. ‘low intelligence drifters’ as ‘Outcasts’, and ‘full time professionals’ as ‘Liberationists’. 
The criteria for establishing the patterns include the ‘feelings and impressions’ of MSWs, their images of themselves and clients, as well as their mode of entry into the profession. Dorais admits that the patterns described below are by no means mutually exclusive, with some of the participants having experienced more than one pattern. However, in the majority of cases, Dorais finds a single pattern and groups the subjects accordingly (2005: 36).

The first pattern identified by Dorais is that of the ‘Outcasts’ whose sex work is frequently street based. ‘Outcasts’ have experienced poverty and homelessness, have histories of sexual abuse, exhibit higher rates of substance abuse and rely upon unsafe sex practices (ibid: 38). Six of Dorais’ 40 respondents he describes as ‘Part-timers’. As the name would imply, Part-timers involve themselves in sex work sporadically, to supplement their income or as a method of paying off personal debts. Few adopt the title of ‘sex worker’, instead ‘perceiving [sex work] as an accessory to their lives’ (ibid: 39). Most identify as heterosexual and abstain from the use of alcohol and other drugs. In contrast, Dorais’ ‘Insiders’ are those young men:

[W]ho have grown up in or around the sex trade to the point that they come to view it as their primary social circle, their ‘family’… They do not regard sex work as a desperate resort but as something natural, an honourable living, despite the hazards associated with it … All the Insiders use alcohol and drugs to varying degrees (ibid: 40).

Dorais finds that ‘Insiders’ have greater levels of positive identification with sex work than ‘Outcasts’, despite sharing similar behavioural traits such as working on the streets and engaging in (sometimes problematic) drug and alcohol use.

Finally Dorais identifies the ‘Liberationists’, a group most noteworthy for their facility to challenge popular beliefs about the ‘subjugated’ (male) sex worker. ‘Liberationists’ use sex work as a means of enacting their sexual fantasies and, consequently, perceive many advantages to working in the sex industry (for example, the potential to meet an older wealthy male to have as a ‘sugar daddy’). Members of this group have not experienced sexual abuse or other problems while growing up. Other characteristics they share include the highest levels of education within the sample, limited consumption of alcohol and cannabis, a willingness to develop emotional bonds with their clients, and possession of ‘high self-esteem and an overall positive outlook on their activities and their clients, they like what they do’ (ibid: 41). ‘Liberationists’ appear balanced and content to a degree incompatible with many popular and academic depictions of sex workers, whether they be male, female or transgender.
Of all the categories proposed in all the research reviewed here, the majority of participants interviewed for this thesis were most similar to the ‘Liberationist’ set of traits (i.e. those who professed to genuinely enjoying and feeling comfortable with the work). These characteristics were also described by earlier researchers, contrasting again with the script of the downtrodden street worker:

A different image is that of the young, promiscuously inclined homosexual who finds occasional prostitution a congenial and profitable activity, one that brings him into contact with interesting people and luxurious surroundings and an exciting lifestyle which he could never afford on his own earnings from a conventional job. Involvement in delinquent acts would for him be counter-productive, alien to his image as a gay-identified, fun-loving young charmer (West & de Villiers 1992: xiii).

1.4 Epidemiological frameworks

With the advent of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s, new research questions emerged surrounding the activities of MSWs. Given the connection between the spread of the virus and anal sex, the tone of much of this research, steeped in epidemiological methodology, was most unfavourable. Epidemiological studies focus on population health, and 1980s STI research considered the threat to the broader public posed by homosexual sexual activities. At the time of the emergence of HIV, homosexual men and MSWs were unashamedly depicted as vectors of disease and as a ‘public health concern’ (Scott 2005a: 171). The title of Morse et al.’s 1991 article demonstrates this prejudice unequivocally: The Male Street Prostitute: A Vector for Transmission of HIV Infection into the Heterosexual World. The authors found that 17.5 per cent of their (New Orleans-based) sample of 211 male street workers were HIV positive and argued that the group posed a considerable risk to (female) non-commercial sexual partners.

Altman (1999) notes that the study undertaken by Morse et al. was representative of the approach taken by researchers engaged with the question of HIV/AIDS in undertaking research ostensibly in the interests of public health. MSWs who identified as heterosexual and bisexual frequently dominated research samples. Their sexual orientation (and the potential for possible sexual relationships with women as well as men) allowed researchers to construct MSWs as posing a far greater threat of spreading the virus than in research that concentrated on the homosexual individuals who comprise the majority of MSWs. Fernandez-Alemaney (2000) argues that labelling sex workers as a ‘risk group’ for the spread of HIV did nothing to protect them from the virus, but served instead to underscore their stigmatisation and the discrimination
they subsequently encountered (see *Rampant: How a City Stopped a Plague*, 2007). Such stigma, prejudice and discrimination are all established risk factors in escapist behaviours, such as drug use, which Minichiello et al. (2003) show affects the safety outcomes of sexual encounters. The irony of this circular relationship appears lost on some researchers.

A 1999 collection of papers edited by Peter Aggleton and released as *Men Who Sell Sex: International Perspectives on Male Prostitution and AIDS* provides the most comprehensive and sensitive collection of studies of MSWs and HIV/AIDS from around the globe. The difficulty in assessing the issues on a global scale is succinctly summed up in one contribution:

> It seems a dubious and unscientific undertaking to compare the rates of HIV positivity in populations that are culturally diverse, from samples that vary in representativeness and in countries in different stages of the epidemic, as if the label ‘prostitute’ were a universal category with specific physical potentials for infection rather than a socially and culturally bound and constrained set of social and sexual practices and relationships (Davies & Feldman 1999: 3).

In applying Western constructions of sexuality to HIV research being conducted in cross-cultural contexts, we render meaningless any data obtained, as we miss the ‘realities of people’s lives, how they see the world and themselves, and how they survive’ (Kahn 1999: 197). For this reason, the research presented in this thesis deliberately restricts itself to a local context. When addressing such sensitive and culturally-specific issues as sexual identity, practices and working relationships, any conclusions drawn from data transported away from its context must be regarded as closer to fantasy than research.

Many of the studies in Aggleton’s book steer away from outlining the incidence of HIV in MSW populations or evaluating MSWs potential ‘risk’ status to the broader community. Instead, they focus on the treatment of positive workers by other workers and the role researchers and community services can play in raising awareness (Zuilhof 1999); or, alternatively, the need for a better understanding of the impact of violence and coercion upon the worker’s ability to negotiate safe sex practices (Allman & Myers 1999). In his book *Practicing Desire: Homosexual Sex in the Era of AIDS*, Dowsett (1996) points to the ‘hegemonic position’ that (quasi) medical discourse has attained in contemporary research. Dowsett calls for negotiations between social and medical science to ascertain how society may arrest the spread of HIV. Research that documents social context and its role in determining identity and activity, such as that collected by Aggleton (and by Morrison & Whitehead 2007, as discussed below) is instrumental in redefining the landscape of MSW research, particularly in the context of HIV. Nonetheless, in
Australia at least, much MSW research continues to concentrate on issues pertaining to safer sex and HIV (for example, Browne & Minichiello 1997), as well as identifying HIV rates among MSWs (Rowe 2011a). Rowe’s study features a unique emphasis on the impressive levels of sexual health knowledge among male, female and transgender sex workers who offer their services in the street, on the Internet and (to a much lesser extent) in illegal brothels. Only one respondent out of Rowe’s sample of 145, a female street worker, was shown to be HIV positive.

In 2000, Estcourt et al. conducted a study of HIV and STI prevalence among MSWs at a busy inner-Sydney public sexual health service. The investigators compared the results of a sample of 94 MSWs with those of two control groups: one of female sex workers and another of gay men. The authors found that 20.9% of the MSW sample suffered genital warts, and almost a third carried one or more STIs (gonorrhoea, chlamydia, syphilis, genital warts, or genital herpes) at the time they presented to the clinic. Four (6.5%) tested positive for HIV. These results were significantly higher than the HIV rate for female workers (0.4%), but lower than that of the homosexual men who were not sex working (23.9%). Of the four HIV positive MSWs in the study, two reported a history of drug abuse involving needles. These findings are useful in delineating the relatively low incidence of HIV infection among MSWs (and female sex workers). However, the study also determined that 20 per cent of the sample had injected drugs, and that MSWs who had exclusively female non-commercial partners were less likely to use condoms than MSWs who had male non-commercial partners. These two factors do little to counter perceptions of MSWs as vectors of disease to the heterosexual community or to alleviate the associated ‘moral panic’.

While this thesis does not focus explicitly on the sexual health-related behaviour of local MSWs, as these issues have been addressed in the findings of the SHANTUSI project (Rowe 2011a), safer sex practices are inextricably bound to notions of power, control, education and social

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7 This 23.9 per cent figure is not representative of rates of HIV within the gay community. Pedrana et al.’s 2008 Suck it and See study found that 13.4 per cent of their sample of men who have sex with men (MSM) tested positive for HIV, with one in five unaware of their positive status. However, given that a significant proportion of this sample were recruited from HIV clinics, and the entire sample of Escourt et al.’s study was recruited form a sexual health centre (indicating an active sex life and engagement in potentially risky behaviours), these figures may be considerably higher than among gay men in general. Pedrana et al. acknowledge that the estimated rate of HIV infection among gay men/MSM in Melbourne is around 10 per cent.

8 A ‘moral panic’ is described by Cohen as when a ‘condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests’ (1973: 9). West and de Villiers (1992) consider the media to play a key role in creating moral panics via its linkage of the sex industry to HIV/AIDS.
stratification. These issues continue to have a place in MSW research, particularly in a circumstance of industrial change. Alongside the public health focus that continues to drive a greater proportion of research conducted with Australian sex workers, and particularly MSWs, a new paradigm is emerging. While more broadly defined, this new approach is easily the most useful in understanding the personal experiences of the male who chooses to engage in commercial sex work in a contemporary context.

1.5 Contributions of Australian research and new directions

The lack of qualitative data outlining the relationships, experiences and self-perceptions of MSWs (as understood by workers themselves) in the research literature is striking. Such an observation is not new. Bimbi (2007) and Walby (2008) also stress the need for qualitative research that takes notice of the lived experience of the male sex worker. There is a distinct lack of general data, both qualitative and quantitative, concerning MSWs in Australia.

The earliest comprehensive Australian research on MSW was data to emerge from a 1983 project titled Young and Gay: A Study of Gay Youth in Sydney. The study was conducted by Garry Bennett (later known as Garrett Prestage) in conjunction with Twenty10, a Sydney-based Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer (GLBTIQ) support organisation. The project conducted a survey across 21 gay venues and sought to investigate the support mechanisms and patterns of substance abuse associated with young gay men. Findings from this project form the basis of Perkins and Bennett’s important 1985 book Being a Prostitute: Prostitute Women and Prostitute Men, which the authors acknowledge as the first significant publication on the topic of MSW. Prior to their work, Winter (1976) had attempted to document the circumstances and experiences of female sex workers across Australia. Abandoning objectivity in favour of a moralistic perspective, Winter describes his subjects as ‘tedious and unpleasant’ (1976: 61). No acknowledgement of MSWs is made in Winter’s work, despite the academic evidence of their existence in other Western democracies (e.g. Raven 1960; Gandy 1971; Coombs 1974), as well as their representation in popular films, including Breakfast at Tiffany’s (1961) and Midnight Cowboy (1969).

Perkins and Bennett’s pioneering 1985 investigation remains one of very few examples of qualitative studies of MSWs in Australia. Few researchers have attempted to chart this territory
since. Utilising a case study approach, Perkins and Bennett controvert many of the myths surrounding men involved in sex work. For example, they note that:

Gay male prostitutes often say it is exciting work, and some people genuinely find that it satisfies their private sexual fantasies. These reasons – money, freedom, pleasure – are reasons anyone might give for choosing any occupation\(^9\) (1985: 221).

This is not portrayed as the universal experience. Such a positive identification with sex work is counteracted by those who express contempt for clients and themselves, such as one participant quoted under the pseudonym ‘Gerry’: ‘It really gets me that I’ve gotten off with old guys and fat cunts. It makes a difference if they’re cunts – it’s a lot harder’ (ibid: 193). By publishing verbatim quotes of Australian MSWs in their research, Perkins and Bennett allow MSWs to speak of their self perception for the first time without imposing an artificial and categorised identity. In doing so, they deconstruct the stereotypical image of the pathological ‘prostitute’ or ‘hustler’.

A qualitative approach has much to offer this strand of knowledge. Maynes, Pierce and Laslett claim that ‘analyses of personal narratives have served to introduce marginalised voices… and they have also provided counternarratives that dispute misleading generalisations or refute universal claims’ (2008: 1). They also astutely problematise the overt subjectivity and authenticity of such ‘voices’ in qualitative research. This issue receives more attention in Chapter Two.

Garrett Prestage, formerly known as Gary Bennett, continued to challenge the dominant paradigms in MSW research as a major contributor to the book *Sex Work and Sex Workers in Australia*, a collection of research published in 1994. Prestage and Perkins teamed again to analyse the naming and framing of the terms sex work/prostitution, which has, according to Altman (2001: 100) created a ‘bitter division’ within this strand of research (although the focus customarily falls upon women). According to the authors, the reframing of ‘prostitution’ as ‘sex work’ seeks to ‘remove the activity from the arena of the illicit and socially unacceptable behaviour and to separate the activity from issues of exploitation’ (Prestage & Perkins 1994: 12). Although a detailed discussion of this complex issue is beyond the scope of this thesis, the term ‘sex work’ has come to be used as a political tool by proponents of the industry as well as community organisations that support sex workers (e.g. Scarlet Alliance, RhED), to emphasise the role of agency and professional skill and satisfaction in an individual’s pursuit of this

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\(^9\) The formation of the ‘sex as work’ discourse is visible here, alongside an attempt by the researchers to normalise the practice.
occupation. On the other side of the debate, feminists have reviled the construction of sex as work - the most vocal and influential of such commentators being Sheila Jeffreys. Jeffreys identifies the need to ‘discuss prostitution in a way which highlights the abuse involved’, considering it ‘necessary to reject the new vocabulary which the prostitutes’ rights movement has introduced’ (1997: 3). Jeffreys prefers to view women’s involvement in sex work as a ‘decision’ rather than using the language of ‘choice’ offered by the construction of sex as work. These contrasting views remain a source of current contention. Jeffreys withdrew from a 2011 feminist conference in Melbourne due to heated opposition from pro-sex work activists and academics. The term ‘sex work’ appears throughout this thesis in order to reflect the language used by local service providers and legislators (the former working towards improving conditions for this population in the same manner as myself), and most importantly, by many of the participants involved in the research. Additionally, and as acknowledged by Prestage/Perkins and Jeffreys, the prostitution vs. sex work debate is further complicated by the incompatibility of the idea of MSWs’ exploitation of female clients in the male sex industry.

In another contribution to Sex Work and Sex Workers in Australia, Prestage provides an illuminating synopsis of ‘male and transsexual prostitution’ (1994). Drawing from the results of the aforementioned Young and Gay study, Prestage sets about detailing features of the MSW experience in an Australian context, no doubt providing some impetus for the subsequent work of Minichiello and colleagues (see below). Prestage argues that, for men, sex work is often pursued on a part-time basis, whereas women typically undertake sex work as a full-time endeavour, deriving all or most of their income from this source over an extended period of time (ibid: 175). He suggests that men who do engage in full time sex work rarely do so for more than a few months, and few would consider this form of income to be their ‘job’ – a claim that is challenged by recent research (Rowe 2011a). Additionally, according to Prestage (ibid), men more readily acknowledge sexual gratification as an incentive for their involvement than do women, and pursue sex work as an active ‘choice’. MSWs are also stated to suffer less violence at the hands of their clients. Although Prestage was writing at a time when the paradigms of typologies and epidemiology remained dominant, his work avoids grouping research subjects arbitrarily for the sake of easy analysis and instead simply highlights basic similarities among MSWs and details the nature of the Sydney-based male sex industry.

Prestage continued the study of MSW in 2007 through an investigation of ‘Sex Work and Risk Behaviour among HIV-negative Gay Men’ (Prestage et al. 2007), surveying 1,427 participants. Key findings uncovered by Prestage and colleagues included rates of gay men’s involvement in
sex work (5% had been paid for sexual services within the past six months; see Chapter Three for a detailed discussion), the greater likelihood of MSWs to use illicit drugs, attend sex parties, and engage in a variety of esoteric sexual practices in comparison to non-sex workers. The authors conclude that men who engage in sex work are typically more sexually active and are more likely to engage in HIV-related risk behaviours than other gay men/MSM (ibid: 933).

Victor Minichiello, in conjunction with several colleagues, has been at the forefront of MSW research, both in Australia and internationally. Browne and Minichiello (1996a) recognised the need for further research which steered away from the dominant frameworks of deviance and pathologisation, paving the way for the most in-depth and ongoing exploration of MSWs in Australia to date. A preliminary study conducted by the authors (1996b, see also 1995) stands as the last qualitative study specifically detailing the activities of MSWs in Melbourne (for later studies also documenting the experiences of female and transgender workers, see Rowe 2006 and 2011a). Among many discoveries, the researchers learned that some MSWs would not use condoms with their private partners, yet insist on the usage of condoms with clients in order to maintain a distinction between ‘work sex’ and ‘personal sex’:

> Cumming inside your partner or his cum inside you is really exciting. With clients it’s just a job. The affections you give are fake. You don’t ever kiss them. And you use condoms. They create a kind of barrier between you and the client, between work sex and personal (‘Brett’, in Browne & Minichiello 1996b: 90).

Browne and Minichiello paired again to investigate safe sex practices (1997), before conducting the largest study of male sex workers in Australia, in which 186 MSWs across varying sites (print media, escort agencies and the street) in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane were asked to record the aspects of each commercial sexual encounter in a diary over a two week period (Minichiello et al. 2000). Important findings outline consistent rates of condom use (67.4%); the chief types of sexual activity during the encounter (oral sex and mutual masturbation at 67.5% and 74.2% respectively); a high rate of positive attitudes towards sex work (two thirds of the sample); and the greater likelihood of street-based MSWs to engage in unsafe sex practices in comparison to those working in alternative settings. This suggests that the desperation that often leads to street-based sex work limits the worker’s control over the nature of their sexual encounter, allowing the client to wield a disproportionate degree of power over such negotiations. While this period of Minichiello’s research focuses on safe sex practices and sexual health, he and his colleagues were cautious to steer clear of the dominant epidemiological frameworks of the 1990s. The diary-based study led to additional publications, including detailed profiles of clients (Minichiello et al. 1999), a rare occurrence in sex work
research, and an investigation into drug and alcohol use in professional encounters (Minichiello et al. 2003).

More recent research carried out by Leary and Minichiello (2007) provides a rare glimpse into the interpersonal relationships of SMSWs. For this study, 27 Sydney-based SMSWs were interviewed. Each participant had spent some time working ‘The Wall’ in Darlinghurst, a well-known (former) rendezvous for MSWs and prospective clients. While the authors note that a worker’s relative youth demonstrates his vulnerability and thus may compromise the safety of the SMSW, this research reveals that risk is lessened by the experience of positive relationships with family and friends. These findings highlight the role of an individual worker’s agency in developing support networks, and counter earlier constructions of young MSWs as downtrodden individuals afflicted by pathos, as well as the idea that simple markers such as age are accurate indicators of vulnerability.

While Leary and Minichiello’s 2007 study is a welcome addition to the scant body of qualitative data of MSW in Australia, there is still a dearth of information regarding the structure or nature of the industry outside of the Sydney street scene, which represents only a small percentage of the national MSW population and cannot be used as an indicator of trends elsewhere. Further, this scene has already been explored by other researchers (e.g. Prestage 1994). In an earlier publication, and in keeping with the principle highlighted above relating to the individual context of MSW, Browne and Minichiello warn researchers against assuming that the experience of a Melbourne-based sample can be extrapolated to those working in another Australian capital or beyond:

Although this group includes a range of experiences in many different forms of male sex work, the sample cannot be considered representative of the male sex work population. In particular, cross-cultural comparisons cannot be made. However, there is no reason to suggest that the lived experiences of this group differ significantly from those of other similar male sex workers in Melbourne. The local nature of the conduct of sex work must, however, be taken into consideration. The informant pointed out that even between Melbourne and Sydney in Australia there are distinctive sub-cultural norms, patterns and behaviours within the sex work profession\(^{10}\). The constraints of law and order, public attitudes to sex work, homosexuality, and safe sex vary between cities, states and countries. Therefore, caution must be taken in comparing this group to those in other countries, even other Australian cities, where understandings and discourses of human sexuality and male sex work may differ (1995: 601-602).

\(^{10}\) It is for this reason that, throughout this thesis, I only attempt to describe local phenomena, rather than extrapolate data from Sydney to explain what might be occurring here and vice-versa. The use and role of technology could also be added to these factors highlighting the differences between locations.
Interpersonal relationships also feature in a US-based study conducted by Smith, Grov and Seal (2008) which investigates notions of ‘physical, personal and social space’ among 30 escort agency workers. The findings concerning romantic relationships are particularly interesting. In some cases, MSWs reported feeling unable to disclose the truth of their employment to their partner, instead pretending to work as a stripper or dancer rather than as a sex worker. Personal relationships frequently adopted the recent ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ policy of the American military. In scenarios where partners did not disapprove of the worker’s professional activities, a reduction in sexual interest following encounters with clients, coupled with late and erratic working hours, often placed a strain on the relationship. In contrast, none of the MSWs interviewed for this thesis reported jealousy as a complicating factor in their existing relationships. This suggests that many partners appreciate a difference between ‘work sex’ and ‘private sex’, supporting similar reports by the workers in Browne & Minichiello’s 1996b study.

The research presented in this thesis reflects the emerging third paradigm outlined by Bimbi (2007) and discussed above. Instead of reducing research subjects to a cluster of categories or patterns of disease and drug abuse, it focuses on the personal and human aspects of MSWs’ lives. The shift in MSW research literature, represented by this thesis, towards investigations into the ways MSWs experience key aspects of their work, such as changes in technology, legislation, and the public perception of their role, is long overdue.

1.6 The advent of the Internet

Recent years have seen publications in another important area of research that examines the shifting structure of the industry. Academics have partially investigated the manner in which the Internet has altered the work of MSWs and the sex industry as a whole. The first study (according to the authors) concerning MSWs operating over the Internet was conducted by Parsons, Bimbi and Halkitis in 2001 and published in the journal Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity. Of the sample of 46 gay and bisexual Internet-based male sex workers in the study, entitled ‘The Classified Project’, 64 per cent possess a bachelor’s degree or greater. This sample appears to have experienced little major socio-economic disadvantage, conflicting with the stereotypical image of the underprivileged street worker deprived of opportunity described by Dorais and others. The data suggest that IMSWs who are more ‘sexually compulsive’ engage in a greater number of unprotected sex acts (echoing the findings of Prestage et al. 2007, as described above), and that there is a correlation between this sexual compulsivity and
levels of sensation seeking and self-confidence. These factors are measured using three different scale systems. While particularly noteworthy as the first published investigation of online MSW, the study contains distinct elements of sexual pathologisation, and serves as an example of a new paradigm revisiting old assumptions regarding MSWs.

A handful of studies have analysed websites and escort advertisements to provide some data on prices of services, payment options and modes of contact (Lee-Gonyea, Castle & Gonyea 200911) as well as sex acts offered and average penis size (Pruitt 2005). While these types of ‘vital statistics’ may have a place in early endeavours into this area of research, more productive lines of inquiry exist that may reveal useful insights into the people to whom the penises in question are attached. In 2008, Minichiello, still at the forefront of MSW research, conducted an international analysis of MSWs advertising online (along with Harvey & Mariño). Alarmingly, Minichiello and colleagues report that of a sample of 1015 MSW advertisements, only 51.6 per cent indicated that they ‘always’ engage in safe sex, with 46 per cent listing ‘prefer not to say’, and 2.4 per cent noting that they ‘sometimes’ or ‘never’ do. Although the research team adhere to an epidemiological paradigm in their discussion of the large numbers of workers advertising their willingness to engage in unprotected sex, this is a necessary step in early stages of research with a ‘new’ and ‘hidden’ (i.e. difficult to reach) population so that outreach services can tailor interventions in accordance with sexual practices. Researchers can thereafter narrow their focus to specific characteristics.

Parsons, Koken and Bimbi (2004) conscientiously avoid any discussion of MSWs as vectors of disease while acknowledging the impact of HIV risk on their subjects’ working lives. In their study of 46 gay and bisexual escorts, the majority of participants state that they would refuse to engage in unprotected sex with clients. Many of the escorts report a secondary role as a sexual health educator, discussing the dangers of unprotected sex during encounters with clients (also reported in Rowe 2011a). As Parsons, Koken and Bimbi point out in a later paper, the focus on HIV and STIs has seen a tendency for researchers to presuppose that MSWs seek clarification on these issues when in reality they are often very knowledgeable. In a 2007 study, the authors opted to ‘set aside our a priori assumptions about what these unique MSWs want or need, and instead let them tell us’ (2007: 222), establishing a sound framework for the conduct of a needs

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11 These authors also refer to transgender workers as ‘transvestites’ (a highly offensive term to a transsexual; for a more sensitive analysis of Internet-based transgender sex workers see Rowe 2011a), and to sex workers as ‘prostitutes’. Unless coming from an abolitionist perspective seeking to highlight exploitation of (female) sex workers (e.g. Sheila Jeffreys), most researchers considered the term ‘prostitute’ to be unacceptable terminology in 2009, suggesting the article is written from an uninformed perspective.
assessment (another significantly underdeveloped research focus). Many MSWs responded with requests for ‘business advice’, in relation to negotiating sales, marketing themselves, completing tax returns, investing their earnings, as well as strategies for screening clients and understanding legal issues. Parsons, Koken and Bimbi use their findings to encourage service providers dealing with MSWs to meet this demand.

In Chapter Six, this thesis employs a similar approach to that found in the Parsons, Koken and Bimbi study in assessing the needs and concerns prevalent among IMSWs in Melbourne. Other recent studies have also successfully elicited information based on MSW personal experience. Uy et al. (2004) use data from ‘The Classified Project’ to investigate the key reasons for men’s involvement in sex work. The authors seek to explain the motivations for individuals’ pursuit of sex work; a topic that receives much attention in Chapter Three of this thesis. Unfortunately, Uy et al. ignore the motivations that the sample may have for using the Internet, and also their subjects’ subsequent experiences with this medium. Addressing this research ‘gap’ is a key aim of this thesis. Uy et al. (2004) miss the opportunity to explore the online environment’s central role in the male sex trade today, preferring to treat the Internet as a peripheral tool.

Phua and Caras (2008) are another team of researchers who investigated the relationship between MSWs and the Internet outside of an HIV/STI framework. Drawing upon a selection of Brazilian and white American IMSW profiles, the authors investigate the manner in which individuals market themselves towards clients. Their study observes workers emphasising particular attributes of their physicality, such as penis size, body hair and type, gender role (e.g. ‘masculine’ or ‘very masculine’) and sexuality. Youth and masculinity were found to be the two most marketable characteristics of IMSWs, while a focus on ethnicity allowed white Americans to reinforce their privileged social status and Brazilians to emphasise their exoticism. This thesis owes much to Phua and Caras for providing a basis for understanding how the language of marketing is used to construct an online persona, and the ways in which racial and masculine stereotypes are adopted in the online MSW market.

Research conducted by Logan (2010) also informs the investigation of marketing practices in this thesis. Logan’s quantitative analysis of escort websites finds that IMSWs appearing to be more masculine in their advertising and provision of sexual services (i.e. taking the active/penetrative role as ‘tops’) may attract a higher premium for their services (by up to 17%), in comparison to men offering services considered to be less masculine (i.e. taking the passive/receptive role as ‘bottoms’). By conforming to ideals of hegemonic masculinity (e.g. Connell 1995) and certain widely-held assumptions regarding virility and an active or penetrative
sexual role, male sex workers may reap certain rewards – an aspect of experience that is supported in this thesis.

Mimiaga and colleagues (2008) examined the behaviour of IMSWs, who they term ‘Internet escorts’. The resulting study is valuable in identifying sexual and health risk factors that may be appropriate for potential service intervention. The authors compare a group of street-based workers with Internet escorts, providing a rare comparative glimpse of two distinct groups from within the same geographical context (Boston, Massachusetts). There is a notable emphasis on HIV prevalence among the sample, with 31 per cent of 32 respondents revealing that they had been diagnosed HIV positive (as well as 41% of the sample reporting histories of sexual abuse). The authors deem it necessary to note whether each participant is ‘HIV-infected’ or ‘HIV-uninfected’ below their interview excerpts throughout the paper. Considering that the participants were recruited from a sexual health clinic specialising in HIV treatment, it is hard to consider the reported figures representative of HIV prevalence across the broader MSW population in the Boston area. The aforementioned study undertaken in Sydney by Estcourt et al. (2000) was more successful in achieving an accurate assessment of HIV prevalence due to that study’s use of a control group. The contribution by Migiama et al. (2008) does not further the research agenda compellingly advocated by the likes of Minichiello, Parsons or Bimbi. Rather, it exploits the emerging paradigm surrounding personal experiences and Internet-based sex workers while returning to tired depictions of MSWs as disease-ridden victims of abuse.

Rowe’s (2011a) comprehensive SHANTUSI project provides the most current and detailed analysis of the male sex industry in Melbourne. The focus of the report is upon the HIV risk and ‘needs’ of male, female and transgender sex workers across the unregulated industry (i.e. street, illegal brothel, and unregistered private Internet-based workers) in Victoria (although all participants were recruited in metropolitan Melbourne). The project presents considerable data concerning the activities of local IMSWs, with eight members of this population interviewed and surveyed for the project, alongside seven SMSWs. The SHANTUSI project serves as the inspiration for this study. Rowe’s research focus offers significant scope for expansion that contextualises the origins of this medium in the local context, and explores the more routine and personal aspects associated with Internet-based male sex work. This thesis expands upon the

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12 This language of ‘infected’ vs. ‘uninfected’ is rejected by local HIV/AIDS service providers (e.g. Living Positive Victoria, Victorian AIDS Council) in favour of the terms ‘HIV positive/negative’. This is due to the stigmatising nature of the ‘infection’ terminology, echoing the shift towards more value-neutral language evidenced within the ‘sex work vs. prostitution’ debate.
1.7 Addressing the gaps in the literature

This section explains the relevance of the research presented in this thesis in relation to the body of work described above. In addition to the investigation of the personal sex lives of MSWs, Bimbi highlights the need for research which examines ‘differences and similarities among MSWs who reach clients via the Internet’ (2007: 29). This recommendation provides a starting point. Although adequate information surrounding MSWs personal (i.e. non-commercial) sexual activities already exists, insufficient data has been collected concerning their ‘differences and similarities’, as well as how these are constructed. While sociological investigation necessitates some typologising, classifying, and categorising (as previous researchers have done), this research is more concerned with reflecting upon the similarities and differences between MSW individuals’ personal and work-related practices, beliefs and self-identity and image. While Prestage (1994) and Minichiello et al. (2000; 2001) provide an overview of the characteristics of MSWs and the male sex industry in Australia, their timing precluded consideration of the impact of the Internet upon the industry. Consequently, insufficient data exists to describe IMSWs in Melbourne, and Australia more broadly.

On the basis of the literature discussed above, this research examines several key issues relevant to IMSWs. As Weitzer (2005) points out, there is a distinct irony in the fact that the most research has been carried out on the least common variety of sex work (i.e. street work). The SMSW population in Melbourne is much smaller than the IMSW population. An analysis of the decline of the street and brothel trades and rise of the Internet appears in Chapter Three. With the online medium dominant and expanding, it is opportune that the subjects of this investigation are workers who use the Internet professionally. This will allow the findings to contribute to a broader investigation of the Internet’s function in creating and maintaining ‘online communities that can support, promote, and justify all manner of deviant behaviour offline’ and why this is so (Blevins & Holt 2009: 639).

Therefore, with a justified online focus, this study examines the ways in which IMSWs actively engage the Internet as a medium to sell sex – specifically, their use of marketing strategies (as discussed by Logan 2010 and Phua & Caras 2008) and images in constructing an online
persona. These are discussed in detail, as are clients’ responses and interactions with the information afforded to them. The thesis then discusses the various ‘offline’ approaches taken by MSWs to complement their online strategies in order to secure a long-term client base and achieve ‘success’ in the industry. The final chapter discusses the key issues, concerns and needs of workers, extending the work and principles of Rowe (2011a) and Parsons, Koken and Bimbi (2007).

The research goals of this project may be summarised neatly in four questions. These are:

- How and why has the Internet arisen as the dominant medium for men selling sex in Melbourne?
- How do MSWs in Melbourne use the Internet to advertise and to secure clients, and how receptive is their client base to such strategies?
- What does it mean to be successful in the online industry? Beyond advertising, what approaches are taken by MSWs in developing sound business acumen?
- What issues and concerns exist among MSWs in Melbourne operating via the Internet? What are the consequences associated with working via this medium?
Chapter Two:
Methodology

2.1 Introduction

This chapter documents the processes undertaken to collect the data contained in this thesis. Conducting research within any clandestine population engaged in illicit activity is an exercise fraught with barriers, both in accessibility and divulgence. Open and frank discussions of sexual behaviour remain taboo in our society, even within (or perhaps because of) a context of industrial relations. However, many of the individuals involved in this project made the interview process an enjoyable and memorable experience where otherwise it may have proven arduous or unsuccessful. A discussion of the ethical issues that required consideration before research could commence with this population appears below. The discussion also covers: theoretical influences and motivations, recruitment and interview procedures, and finally, methods of data analysis. Participant demographics and backgrounds are available in an appendix.

2.2 Ethics

With the preliminary research and the identification of several gaps in the broader MSW literature (as described in the previous chapter) complete, the next stage in this project was to gain ethics approval from the Human Research Ethics Sub-Committee (HRESC) at RMIT University. Several key ethical issues were identified for consideration. Given the tendency of many sex workers to adopt a pseudonym\(^\text{13}\) (Sanders 2005; Taylor 1991) to protect their non-working identity, issues of privacy, anonymity and confidentiality for MSW respondents were of paramount importance. The potential for personal questions about sex work experience to cause psychological harm to research participants was identified as another ethical danger. The fact that many MSWs actively enjoy their work (Dorais 2005; West & de Villiers 1992) compared with more disadvantaged groups in the industry such as female street workers (Rowe 2006; 2011a) curtailed my fears of traumatising interviewees with questions. However, such concerns can (and should) never truly be quelled.

Following the submission of an ethics application in April 2010, the project was formally approved on the 19\(^{th}\) of April without need for amendment. A series of developments occurred

\(^{13}\) While this is true for the majority of sex workers, three participants in this study choose to work using their birth name. This issue is discussed in further detail in Chapter Five.
within the first 12 months that required consultation with the HRESC, including the abandonment of the study’s original focus on romantic relationships\textsuperscript{14} (on the advice of senior academics), and also with the addition of a diary-based study and online profile analysis. Given the personal nature of the information provided by participants throughout the interview process, a thoughtful and sensitive interview schedule was deemed necessary. Professional counsellors were available through RhED to assist any participant who became distressed; an incident which, thankfully, did not occur.

An effective rapport with all participants blossomed over the course of the research. Many subjects demonstrated significant enthusiasm for the project throughout the recruitment and interview process. Following an initial cold call to individuals advertising online to explain the aims of the project, all participants were issued with a Plain Language Statement (PLS) via email to familiarise each of them with the research process. Each participant was asked whether they required clarification of any issues at the first face-to-face meeting. Once sure that a sound understanding of the study’s intentions and our dual responsibilities had been reached, each participant signed and dated a consent form. All participants were paid AU$50 for their time and effort, as is standard practice in such qualitative projects. To address the concerns around anonymity, all identifying names, locations and other details have been changed or omitted from transcripts. All participants have been assigned pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

2.3 \textit{Rationale for qualitative approach/interviewing}

A qualitative approach to the research method and analysis was chosen for the study. This was considered effective in discovering nuanced and detailed information concerning the highly personal experiences of this group, and better placed to understand the complexity of a participant’s current situation. As a key qualitative method, face to face semi-structured interviewing was selected as the primary means of data collection. As highlighted in Chapter One, there is a dearth of research regarding MSWs’ personal experience, and the least data of all exists in relation to the use of the Internet. To date, researchers have examined MSWs’ Internet activity predominantly through a quantitative and/or qualitative analysis of websites as opposed to the people who use them. Therefore, it was important that this study allow the MSW

\textsuperscript{14} This focus was abandoned in favour of a pursuing a sociological examination of MSWs’ working lives and experiences within the industry, rather than focusing on their more personal, private and emotional experiences.
population to relay, in their own words, their experience using the Internet as a medium for selling sexual services.

As Sommer and Sommer note, while interviews are very useful in the exploration of themes such as sexual behaviour, such topics are ‘complex and emotionally loaded. Interviews are also useful in areas where opportunities for observation are limited’ (2002: 112). With observation in this instance out of the question, interviews were considered the most appropriate alternative. Most participants proved candid and forthcoming in their interviews, which was greatly appreciated. Sommer and Sommer (ibid) argue that participants are more likely to behave in an open manner when they can be reassured that their identity will be protected (participants were assured of their anonymity both in interviews and the ethical documentation), and are more sincere in their responses when convinced that the researcher bears no moral judgment\textsuperscript{15}. Given the exceptionally personal nature of the information revealed to me in interviews, I can only hope that participants knew their disclosures met with no condemnation.

\subsection*{2.4 Eligibility, recruitment and pilot interviews}

The project began with the intention of restricting interviews to individuals who had been working in the sex industry for a minimum of six months within the past year. However, this was considered problematic due to the potential for significant lapses in the memories of sex workers who had been inactive for more than a few months. In the interests of gathering the most reliable data possible, the restriction was tightened to active workers. To broaden the pool of potential participants, the minimum of six months total sex work experience was reduced to one month. These changes reflected Prestage’s (1994) assertion that many members of the MSW population are transient, and are unlikely to engage in sex work for extended periods of time.

Initially, the project concerned only men who explicitly sell sexual services as sex workers, and not massage therapists or ‘body workers’ who offer minor sexual services such as ‘hand jobs’. However, the experiences of ‘body workers’ can mirror those of men who identify as sex workers and the inclusion of this group allowed this study to reach its target sample size. The project had also intended to involve heterosexual MSWs, however none of the workers

\textsuperscript{15} As noted above, I was able to develop a sound rapport with the greater majority of research participants – principally, I believe, due to my status as a non-judgemental gay man who is comfortable discussing ‘taboo’ topics of a sexual nature.
contacted through classifieds website Cracker (www.cracker.com.au) responded to telephone or digital messages.

In locating members of the broader IMSW population and requesting their participation, a cold call to workers was recognised from the outset as the only effective recruitment method. Given potential participants’ suspected lack of engagement with community services (an assumption proven accurate in Chapter Six), it was unfeasible to rely on an organisation such as RhED to facilitate contact. Websites Gaydar (www.gaydar.com.au) and Rentboy (www.rentboyaustralia.com) were perused for profiles of IMSWs, with contact numbers recorded for each individual alongside their profile name (rarely their working name, let alone their birth name e.g. ‘Austria80’, ‘Fantasy Boy’).

A poster seeking workers from across the industry, including the street, brothels, agencies, print media and the Internet, was displayed in the reception area at RhED in April 2011 with the permission of general manager Sue White. At this time, the focus of the study was not yet constrained to the Internet and a broader analysis of the male sex industry (and MSWs’ relationships and identity) was under consideration. This poster prompted three phone calls in a six month period, all from street workers, indicating the lack of engagement with such services from other sectors of the MSW population. Due to concerns about the authenticity of the other respondents, only one of these workers was selected. The subsequent interview with street worker Jed forms part of Chapter Three’s investigation into the current state of the SMSW trade in Melbourne. The recruitment poster was removed from RhED following the narrowing of the research focus, which occurred with the realisation that Internet-based workers were not only under-researched, but were also the most accessible population. Research questions were revised accordingly (see the Appendix for a copy of the interview schedule).

A list of IMSW contact phone numbers was compiled and cold calling commenced in April 2010. Interviews occurred between April and June. Some workers did not provide a telephone number (for reasons explained in Chapter Four) and were only contactable through digital messaging. In this initial round of calls, messages and interviews, 22 workers were approached to participate and seven agreed – five from Gaydar, and two from Rentboy. Two workers were unsure and requested ‘time to think’ about their potential participation, while the remainder terminated the conversation as soon as they were aware of my role as a researcher.
Several possibilities may explain this hesitancy to take part in a research project. Primarily, there is the fact that many IMSWs are working unregistered (without a SWA\textsuperscript{16} number) and are understandably wary of admitting involvement in illicit activity, perhaps fearing entrapment by law enforcement officials. One participant, Seth, revealed his fear that I was an undercover officer and would arrest him. He described how, before our first meeting, he had observed me from afar to determine the likelihood of my being a police officer.

Secondly, given that this study aims to unpack personal experiences within the industry, individuals working on a casual basis may be hesitant to participate in a project investigating their experience as a ‘sex worker’. By participating, they may be confronted with the possibility of identifying as a sex worker - a prospect most unappealing to some men involved in the industry (a situation linked to a dissociative strategy discussed in Chapter Six). Thirdly, the sum of money offered as remuneration is miserly in comparison to a male sex worker’s average hourly earnings of AU$200 or more. Therefore, as experienced in other local studies with IMSWs (Rowe 2011a), some workers may deem a nominal payment of AU$50 unworthy of their time. In contrast, several workers were happy to take part without payment, displaying genuine interest in the project and an eagerness to tell their story.

Gaining access to sex workers for research purposes can be a tricky business, although is certainly simpler now than in the 1970s when Winter endured (perhaps exaggerated) threats to his safety:

> There are no authorities on prostitution in Australia from whom information can be sought, excepting of course, the underworld and the police, both of who are quite unapproachable. The sociologist must be prepared to go out into the field and meet the prostitutes on their home ground – for they will never come to him. This is difficult, dangerous and unrewarding… it is possible for the sociologist to be bashed or even murdered in his attempt to extract information from this underworld network (Winter 1976: 13).

Bashings and murders remained thankfully distant from the conduct of this study, although the words of Dorais did ring true at certain stages throughout the recruitment process. The male sex industry is, he states, ‘a world in which those who ask questions are regarded with extreme distrust, a world highly impermeable to even the best-trained, best-intentioned young researchers’ (2005: 5). Mirroring the experience of this project, Dorais acknowledges that for each interview granted in his sample of 40, his research team was met with numerous refusals.

\textsuperscript{16} Under the Sex Work Act (1994) private sex workers in Victoria must be registered under a SWA number. This is discussed in detail in the final chapter.
With the initial eight MSWs who agreed to be interviewed (seven IMSWs and one street worker), a generic interview schedule was used in the hope of eliciting some key themes that could then be refined. These semi-structured interviews occurred in locations of the participants’ choice: their own homes, a private lounge at RMIT University, the nurse’s office at RhED, and cafés and bars. Each interview typically ran for 45 minutes to an hour. In the months following the conduct, transcription and analysis of these pilot interviews, the research questions were revised to focus more intently upon: the scope, size and operation of the Melbourne-based male sex industry; the reasons for the Internet’s popularity; the ways in which workers use the Internet to sell their services; ‘self-monitoring’ and offline strategies for attracting clients; and what, if any, needs and concerns existed among this group (see section 2.7).

Aside from the interviews with MSW participants, two unstructured interviews were carried out with key informants. Christian Vega, former health educator and outreach worker at RhED, was interviewed as a key informant due to his extensive personal and professional experience in the Melbourne-based male sex industry. Ari Reid of the Sex Industry Network (SIN) in Adelaide was also interviewed in the period before the project found its Melbourne focus. Ms Reid shared invaluable background knowledge of the sex industry in Adelaide, and revealed how (extremely surreptitiously) MSWs operate in his city.

2.5 Profile analysis

In order to ascertain the varieties of personas that IMSWs adopt in their advertising, all 47 profiles listed on Gaydar and all 15 from Rentboy were studied in September and October 2010. Images and text used by workers were analysed for apparent trends. Key worker ‘types’ emerged through this process, with each worker projecting an image that complied with a ‘boy next door’, an ‘exotic’, a ‘poor uni student’, a ‘body worker’, or a ‘hyper masculine’ stereotype. The types of services offered, in addition to the text and images used, each contribute to the construction of this image, and this data is used to draw preliminary conclusions that help explain the relationship between masculine identities and marketing strategies.

17 Although this emerged as a ‘type’, it is less about a persona and more about types of services offered, and for that reason is excluded from the discussion of sexual stereotypes in Chapter Four.
2.6 Participant diary

In order to provide some qualitative data drawn with the maximum possible proximity to a client encounter, a participant diary was trialled. Minichiello and colleagues (1999; 2000; 2001) used a diary approach among their sample of MSWs; an approach with the key advantage that no time is allowed for retrospection and the relevant information is recorded instantaneously, unimpaired by memory. This study intended to follow Minichiello’s methodology and issue participants a diary to fill out following their initial interactions with clients, either online or over the phone, as well as after the encounter had taken place. Diary questions centered on references to the worker’s profile, seeking to document the role of the worker’s constructed online persona both at the consultation and encounter stages of the transaction.

Participants were intended to make diary entries for three to five consecutive encounters. A fixed time frame (e.g. two weeks) was deemed unfeasible due to the potential irregularity of available work. With the diary complete, participants would be asked to attend a debriefing interview. A diary was issued to one participant. Despite the worker’s great enthusiasm for the project, his responses were found to be vague and generalised across encounters, rather than referring to each specific encounter. With this failure, it became apparent that diarising each commercial sexual encounter in the necessary detail was too much to ask of participants without a greater financial incentive, and that the enthusiasm and level of detail provided by participants could not be guaranteed. The diary was subsequently eliminated from this study’s methodology.

2.7 Second round interviewing

Semi-structured interviewing resumed in February of 2011 and concluded in August of the same year. In this second round, 51 new potential participants were contacted by telephone and digital message, and 35 responded with refusal. This stage yielded 11 additional participants from Gaydar and five from Rentboy, creating a total of 16 participants recruited in the second round of interviewing. In total, 73 IMSWs were contacted over the entire recruitment period, comprising 23 participants and 50 refusals (a consent ratio of approximately one in every three calls). It is noteworthy that the 73 workers contacted for this study is more than the sum of all MSW services advertised on the major websites at any one time, due to the short-term nature of many workers. Including street worker Jed, 24 participants made themselves available for the
study overall, although in most cases the study refers to the 23 participants working via the Internet (including three body workers).

Questions that informed this stage of the interview process were of a more specific nature than those asked in the initial round. Interviewees were encouraged to discuss their feelings towards their own work and the industry as a whole, and probed for detailed responses around their advertising techniques (e.g. how and why they had designed their working profile, the extent to which they had purposefully constructed a particular image, and whether it was characterised by certain masculine stereotypes). The interviews concluded by exploring the workers’ relationships (or lack thereof) with service providers and fellow IMSWs, their understanding of (and compliance with) legislation, as well as identifying any needs or concerns pertaining to their sex working lives. In this second round of field research, interviews ran for approximately one hour, although in five cases the interviews ran for approximately two hours due to the more detailed lines of questioning that emerged as the research focus developed over time. Many exceptionally friendly, articulate and intelligent men took part in the study, eager to relay their experiences in the industry and express their views of the bureaucratic regulations attempting to govern their working lives.

2.8 Data analysis and writing up

The analysis and presentation of this study’s data draws on the framework for the use of qualitative material as recommended by the journal *Social Science and Medicine*. Interview data comprising 162 pages were transcribed, however certain phrases such as ‘um’ and excessive repetitions of the word ‘like’ were removed to assist readability without compromising the participants’ perspective. Data were analysed thematically. This analysis was performed manually without the aid of software such as NVivo, although transcript themes were checked for reliability and consistency by the study’s primary supervisor at RMIT University. During the initial reading of the transcripts, notes of emerging themes were recorded in a preliminary fashion. Subsequent readings saw interview extracts coded under the identified themes (e.g. ‘stigma’). Sub-themes were identified and excerpts collated under the original theme (e.g. ‘disclosure of work’). Themes were then related back to the literature to ascertain whether alternative themes identified by previous researchers could be supported or contested by the data. The thesis was subject to continual drafting and redrafting between November 2010 and January 2013.
2.9 Methodological limitations

Despite the value of a qualitative approach in identifying rich data detailing the lived experiences of individuals, there are notable limitations to the methodology. Firstly, while qualitative data is most helpful in highlighting the complexities of certain phenomena and aspects of experience, it cannot indicate their relative frequency (i.e. to provide us with a statistical analysis of how, when and where such issues occur). Interview data is highly retrospective in nature, inviting potential misrepresentations of fact due to lapses in memory and/or confabulations. Further, the data is only able to reflect upon a participant’s perspective and experience as expressed at a particular point in time. As Maynes, Pierce and Laslett remind us:

[F]or all of its richness, personal narrative research brings its own uncertainty and incompleteness. The truths that emerge from the analysis of personal narratives can be precious and are often otherwise unknowable, but they are also complex, contingent and subject to revision (2008: 156).

The intention of this statement is not to discredit the legitimacy of participants’ responses, but rather to highlight the likelihood that such perspectives change over time, across and within specific contexts. Finally, given the overall consent ratio, this sample could be considered representative of the IMSW population in Melbourne, but certainly not representative of MSWs across other sites. It is also true that the experiences of those who refused an interview may have been very different to those shared in the study by respondents. The perspectives of this silent MSW population may have pointed to a range of issues that remain unexplored.
Chapter Three:

The changing trade

‘We’re in 2011, this is how we communicate’ (Kent).

3.1 Introduction

This chapter draws upon research literature, the perspectives of a key informant, and study participants’ qualitative interview data to map the nature and size of the male sex industry in Melbourne, Victoria, and detail the movement of MSWs out of long-established sites of sex work and into the domain of Internet-based work. It locates the industry within its social context by outlining the extent of gay (and heterosexual) male involvement in sex work, and emphasises that MSW is not a peripheral issue, despite its marginal status in academic research and popular culture. Traditional sites of sex work are investigated in order to understand the gradual depopulation of these in favour of an Internet-based presence. Once a hectic site of street-based male sex work in Melbourne (due to its notoriety as the city’s only public thoroughfare where male sex workers were available), Shakespeare Grove in St Kilda has seen a significant decline in trade over the past decade. Many workers have noted the recent ‘death’ of this street scene within the Melbourne male sex industry. The onetime popularity and reasons for the street trade’s decline are detailed in this chapter. The chapter also discusses male sex workers’ relative desertion of brothel and agency-based work, alongside some of the inconveniences experienced by private escorts advertising in print media.

Several factors are shown to have contributed to the momentum behind the surge in Internet-based work. The interview data reveal a variety of motivations for engaging with this medium, including a greater degree of perceived convenience, autonomy, safety and remuneration (combined with an ability to avoid paying tax). Clients are also observed to be reaping the benefits of this sex work ‘setting’, and a brief typology of clients is developed to provide demographic data describing the demand side of the market. To summarise, this chapter provides a ‘snapshot’ of the industry as it operates at the time of writing, and examines the key (technological) changes that have taken place in the male sex industry.
3.2 *Extent of gay male/MSM involvement in MSW*

In framing an extended discussion of male sex work, an analysis of the extent of industry involvement among members of the gay community is important to dispel the impression that MSW is a fringe issue that impacts little upon gay lifestyles. Recent Australian research is helpful in providing estimates of the extent of (gay) men involved in sex work. Garrett Prestage (1994), one of few to have researched the issue, puts the figure of gay men selling sexual services at some stage in their lives at around 20-25 per cent. This figure is based upon participants’ responses in the *Young and Gay* Sydney-based study, in which the sample of 294 ‘young gays’ (alongside 142 young women and five transgender persons) were asked if they had ever ‘cracked it’ and how they felt about it (Bennett 1983). Prestage and colleagues carried out the recent *PASH* (Pleasure and Sexual Health) study, surveying 2306 gay men/men who have sex with men (MSM) around the country. More than one in six respondents (18.3%) reported having ‘ever’ been paid for sex, while 4.3 per cent admitted to having been paid for sex in the preceding year (Prestage et al. 2009). Outside of the gay/MSM population, Rissel et al. (2003) conducted a telephone survey of 10,173 men around Australia and found that 0.9 per cent of *all* men had accepted payment for sex at some time. This rate was almost twice that found for women (0.5%). Two thirds of these men had been paid by other men.

Earlier studies found similar rates of engagement in sex work among (gay) males. The extent of MSW originally surfaced in Kinsey and colleagues’ groundbreaking 1948 report *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, where the authors claimed that: ‘homosexual [street] prostitutes are, in many large cities, not far inferior in number to the females who are engaged in heterosexual prostitution’ (1948: 596). More recently, in England, Taylor concluded that the number of male (street) sex workers operating there was comparable to that of females, and emphasises the surreptitious nature of MSW:

> For every hundred girls peddling their wares on street corners, there are a hundred unobtrusive male prostitutes, of all ages, offering their services to both heterosexual and homosexual clients. Students, university graduates, some married, some with other jobs, they are almost invisible and the police hardly know of their existence (1991: 97).

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18 To ‘crack it’ is an outdated slang term for the selling of sexual services.

19 A reminder to the reader that Garry Bennett changed his name to Garrett Prestage and is therefore using his own data.

20 Based on data obtained by her friend ‘Charlie’ who claimed to have interviewed 4000 male and female sex workers across the country. While few details are mentioned by Taylor, it is reasonable to assume that a large proportion of this sample would have been found in the capital, London.
While the prevalence of MSW received academic attention in the late 1970s, researchers of this period concentrated upon prevalence in relation to the local gay and MSM populations. Bell and Weinberg (1978, cited in West & de Villiers 1992: xv) surveyed a large number of gay men of varying ethnicities in San Francisco. A quarter of the white gay men they interviewed had been paid for sexual services at some stage in their lives, while an even greater proportion of gay black men also reported as such. A year later, Jay and Young (1979) surveyed 5000 gay men and lesbians in the United States. They found that 24 per cent of the gay men in the study had been paid for sex in their lifetime. While these reports are dated, they offer a useful comparative point to the data uncovered by Bennett/Prestage in 1983. The studies indicate a consistent incidence of engagement in sex work in analogous contexts (i.e. London, San Francisco and Sydney, which have shared an identity as gay hubs from around the period of gay liberation through to the present).

The available literature shows that the rate of engagement in male sex work appears to have remained stable across time and place. For many young, sexually active gay men, sex work has become normalised to the extent that, for some, it is a rite of passage. Given the attitudes expressed by participants in this study alluding to sex work’s ordinariness, it is reasonable to conclude that the proportion of men involved remains comparable with the figures indicated in the aforementioned research. Sheila Jeffreys, a radical lesbian separatist, argues that some gay men consider being paid for sex a means by which to ‘gain status’ (1997: 92). This argument is corroborated by reports of men enjoying a boost to their ego when handsomely remunerated in exchange for their time and services (Goodley 1994; Rowe 2006; Uy et al. 2004).

In Koken, Bimbi and Parson’s recent US-based research, participants spoke of ‘subcultural norms within the gay community [that] framed being paid for sex as a sign of prestige’, yet, paradoxically, ‘being offered money for sex is so common as to be nearly unremarkable’ (2010: 223-224). This view of Koken and her colleagues is supported by the participants in this thesis, which details many workers enjoying perks such as handsome remuneration, overseas holidays and the flattery of constant attention from wealthy men, while acknowledging they are involved in an activity that is widespread in the community.

Yeah, they [gay men in general] are nonchalant about it. They’ve got friends who do it as well. And [I have] a new flatmate who’s just moved in, he’s only young [and] he found out and saw my profile… they all find out in the end, or they’re all either doing it themselves, or I find out… I think it’s pretty prevalent. I reckon one or two in ten have done it or tried it at some stage in their lives (Karl).
All my friends were doing it, and they encouraged me to do it, and I told everyone — not my family, they still don’t know… Then my ex-boyfriend started doing it. We were good friends after we broke up, and he said ‘oh, it’s so easy, you can make heaps of money’ (Barry).

On numerous occasions during interviews with research participants, the accepting and judgement-free manner with which many young and sexually active gay men regard engagement in sex work was made clear. For example, Jack spoke of bumping into an acquaintance in the supermarket who mentioned his involvement in sex work during casual conversation (despite barely knowing Jack). Jared noted the many calls he has received from men (after viewing his online advertisement) seeking advice as to how they might embark on their own sex industry careers.

While participation in sex work appears unexceptional in the gay social world, and is ‘probably more widespread than is often recognised’ (Altman 2001: 110), it is important to underline the connection between the research findings detailed above (particularly those put forward by Prestage et al. in 2009) and the qualitative interview data. The former indicates a high number of individuals who have ‘ever’ sold sexual services (i.e. including those who have done so as an isolated incident). This correlates with Karl’s claim that gay men may ‘try it’, as opposed to embarking on a sex work career (either in the long or short-term). Although the central focus of this thesis is upon those men identifying as sex workers who have worked in the industry for a period of at least one month (as outlined in the methodology), it remains important to mention those who engage in sex work, albeit as a ‘once off’ or under highly infrequent and clandestine circumstances.

The data above indicates that the extent of casual engagement in sex work among members of the gay community is sufficiently great to have normalised the practice, whereby men are frequently ‘nonchalant’ about selling sex themselves or ‘know someone who has done it’. Such normalisation has significant potential impacts upon issues of privacy, anonymity, and working and personal identity. For example, some workers interviewed are so comfortable and unashamed of their involvement in sex work that not only do they disclose details of their occupation to (almost) everyone in their lives, but also use their real name in place of the ubiquitous pseudonym. This was the case with three of the participants in this study. 21

21 Irrespective of the openness exhibited by these participants, pseudonyms have been assigned to protect their identities.
3.3 **Online proposals and informal sex work**

Before investigating the current structure of the traditional male sex industry in Melbourne, where men work in established locations (e.g. brothels, the street), it is important to highlight two groups within the broader MSW population about which little is known: gay or bisexual men engaging in ‘once off’ or occasional sex work transactions (as described above by Prestage in 1994 and with colleagues in 2009), and heterosexual male sex workers servicing women, known as ‘gigolos’. There exists an unknown number of gay men who are propositioned for paid sex in settings unique to the gay and MSM community, such as beats\(^{22}\), sex on premises venues (SOPVs) and nightclubs (Prestage 1994; Rowe 2011a). In addition, and more pertinent to an understanding of the extent to which the Internet has changed the male sex industry, are the reportedly large numbers of men who are propositioned online (often by older men). Such men may provide sexual services in exchange for cash without necessarily advertising, marketing, or viewing themselves as a sex worker. Very little is known about this group, however there is evidence to suggest that their numbers (in conjunction with those propositioned in gay venues) far outstrip those who are sex working professionally. Karl implied that these men may make up a considerable proportion of the overall MSW population, and in light of his observations, they may comprise the bulk of the 18.3 per cent figure relayed by Prestage and colleagues (2009).

A lot of people don’t advertise, they’re just on Manhunt (www.manhunt.com.au), younger guys mostly, and they constantly get offers… I know some of my young friends get hit on like ten times a day, just on their normal Manhunt or Gaydar profiles. So, there’d be thousands out there that don’t advertise or anything (Karl).

The incidence of these types of online experiences is unknown, as is the extent to which this type of casual engagement may serve as the gateway to a career as an advertised sex worker, as was the case for Jack and Bailey:

> Somebody actually online saw photos of myself [on a personal profile] and offered me money, and [at] other times in my life, I would have laughed, like, ‘as if!’ And I looked at the person and I thought ‘yuk’. I basically considered it [but] I didn’t go through with it, but [my involvement in sex work] sort of started [then] (Jack).

Initially starting it, it was just purely the money, I was doing my chef apprenticeship and I was doing very long hours, and I started doing it on and off by people offering me money, and then I started to work for an agency.

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\(^{22}\) A ‘beat’ is a slang term used to denote public spaces (including parks and toilets) where gay men/MSM meet to engage in casual sex.
[So you would engage in sex work when you were on Gaydar as in, random strangers offered you money for sex?]

Yeah (Bailey).

An example of the messages these informal ‘clients’ send to men via their personal (i.e. non-commercial) profiles on Internet dating sites is documented below. This particular ‘offer’ was sent to me while I was seeking research participants online, and mirrors other messages I have received while personally patronising these sites. Given the characteristics of such messages (e.g. the absence of personal information in regards to the recipient, the explicit pornographic content, the absence of grammatical efficacy), they appear to be sent en masse. It would be interesting to know how many men - possibly driven by economic need, sexual desire or curiosity - engage with such proposals.

DO YOU WANT CASH$$$$$$
GET $$ TO WANK OR FEED ME YOUR COCK
i am a 33 yr old guy who loves watching guys get their gear off and love watching guys have a wank, i also suck cock and eat arse for hours .i love paying guys for their time and load of sweet cum i only aim to please so i dont expect anthing back in return (just give me your load of sweet cum). i love men who just want to lay back and be serviced, no strings. just let me service you let my mouth do all the work discretion assured.no strings .im an easy going guy who will sit and chat when you get in and after youuve been serviced ill make you a coffee and let you un wind

Looking for: people who love to have their cock sucked by the best and who enjoy getting their arse rimmed for hours. men who know what they want and just want someone to give it to then no strings and no questions just you get pleased how ever you like it and get paid for your time married , single straight, bi or just curious . try it if you like it your welcome to come back as oftern as you like.

The consequence of such online activity is that any (though likely young and attractive) male patronising such websites may be constructed as a sex worker, and the exchange of cash for intimacy is normalised. The positioning of strangers as potential sex workers, willing to satiate one’s sexual desires, creates a new paradigm for how we understand the limitations that gay men/MSM put on the display of their sexuality. In this way, the Internet allows ‘clients’ using such websites to commercialise images and online identities which may be sexualised, but are not intended for commercial consumption (i.e. they are intended for dating/non-commercial purposes). The marriage of accessibility and financial incentive allows online identities to be manipulated in a manner that is impossible with other image-based media in the sex industry (e.g. pornography).
Gay men have been accused by lesbian feminists of championing a public-sex-oriented agenda (e.g. Jeffreys 2003) through their long history of using beats. From Jeffreys’ perspective, the Internet may be the latest tool to facilitate this agenda, potentially damaging those being asked to partake in such informal commercial sexual activity. Some consider unsolicited proposals offensive (as mentioned by Jack prior to the embarkation of his sex working career). The frequency of the offers seems to normalise the implied behavior in the eyes of a significant number of young men, and drastically alters our understanding of what constitutes commercial and non-commercial sex. Indeed, within this context, the terms ‘client’ and ‘sex worker’ begin to lose their meaning.

3.4 Heterosexual MSWs – fact, or fiction?

An additional factor complicating an understanding of the industry and its associated groups is the existence of a small, but clearly evidenced, population of heterosexual MSWs operating online and via escort agencies. It is of no use to refer to ‘MSWs’ without considering the sexualities of all men involved (which largely inform personal and professional experiences) and providing a demarcation between heterosexual and homosexual male sex workers. It is, however, the latter whose experiences inform the key arguments of this thesis.

Although heterosexual male sex workers, or ‘gigolos’, have attracted some attention in academic research (Perkins & Bennett 1985) they appear to be a rare commodity. As an object of male and female heterosexual fantasy, the heterosexual sex worker enjoys an established place in popular culture (e.g. American Gigolo, Breakfast at Tiffany’s, Midnight Cowboy, Deuce Bigalow: Male Gigolo, Hung). A discussion of the male sex industry would not be complete without an acknowledgement of the small, but significant role they play. According to Toy (2010), gigolo services are increasing in popularity among time poor and lonely professional women, due to a ‘democratisation of objectification’ of bodies. Scott also notes an increase in the number of females seeking the services of male sex workers, reporting these clients to be mostly married, affluent women in their twenties and thirties (2005b: 251). Marking the (re)emergence of the gigolo in the Australian consciousness, a heterosexual male sex worker character has a central role in the Showtime television network’s popular drama series Satisfaction, set in a Melbourne brothel.
Scott suggests that in the case of heterosexual MSWs, supply may outstrip demand, and that most gigolos find it difficult to support themselves with the income earned from sex work (ibid). That is not to say that a gigolo’s work is always slow, with a small amount of evidence revealing it can be a lucrative enterprise (Perkins & Bennett 1985; Lee-Gonyea, Castle & Gonyea 2009).

One reporter documented the rise of a male-for-female escort service, *My Male Companion*, on whose behalf eight male escorts (working on an exclusively heterosexual basis) have allegedly serviced hundreds of women across the eastern states over recent years (Toy 2010). This stands in contrast to Prestage’s claim that ‘it is simply not possible for a heterosexually identified male prostitute to entirely avoid engaging in homosexual behaviour’ (1994: 182). While no IMSWs solely servicing women could be persuaded to take part in this project, Jed, the only street worker interviewed for this study, reported servicing women - although primarily in a threesome situation, and avoided touching men in such circumstances. He would, however, engage in occasional oral sex where he was the insertive partner or anal sex where he was the active partner - a familiar story for heterosexual street workers in assenting to the demands of the homosexually-driven MSW market (Dorais 2005).

There is no definitive data available to determine how many heterosexual (Internet-based) MSWs are operating in comparison to those who identify as gay. Previous studies (de Graaf et al. 1994; Morse et al. 1999; Simon et al. 1994) identifying high rates of heterosexual orientation among MSWs are not only inapplicable to this context due to their focus on street workers, but they are also dated. Jeffreys considers ‘the numbers of women using men in prostitution… too tiny to be of note’²³ (1997: 103). Yet Jeffreys provides no comparative or statistical evidence for this claim and its credibility must be questioned - particularly in light of her systematic determination to prove misogynistic exploitation of female workers, and the idea of women ‘using’ men’s bodies for their own sexual gratification via ‘prostitution’ is incongruent with her views. A more objective approach to quantifying heterosexual men in sex work would be to view the websites where sex workers of all genders and sexualities advertise (e.g. *Cracker*), recognising that advertisements for exclusively heterosexual MSWs are unlikely to be found on websites targeted at gay men.

Observations of *Cracker* over a period of weeks showed an average of one or two profiles of gigolos could be found, while 67 profiles of gay IMSWs were advertised across three websites.

²³ According to Rissell et al. (2003), 15.6 per cent of Australian men have ever paid for sexual services, in comparison with only 0.1% of women. Perhaps if the figure were 0.00001% Jeffreys’ argument could be justified. 0.1% is a significant figure, and incorporates thousands of women around the country who have purchased sexual services at some stage in their lives.
Rentboy \((n=15)\), Gaydar \((n=47)\), and Boys2Rent \((n=5^{24})\). The eight men studied by Toy (2010) for *My Male Companion* between them serviced several hundred women across several states over several years. In contrast, many men interviewed in this thesis personally see several hundred men in *one* state in *one* year. This discrepancy signals the contrast between the levels of demand in the gay male and heterosexual female client markets and suggests that the latter, while providing for a good 'story' for the commercial media, is not as common.

It is also important to note that of the Internet-based workers interviewed (i.e. excluding heterosexual street worker Jed), most \((n=21)\) identified as gay and very few \((n=2)\) as bisexual, even if those of bisexual orientation had not engaged in sexual relations with a female for many years. While the term ‘men who have sex with men’, or ‘MSM’ might be more appropriate in an effort to avoid assigning all individuals concerned with a gay or bisexual identity, participants actively embraced certain aspects of gay culture, such as specific clubs and bars. Moreover, all participants pursued close personal and sexual relationships with other men. Consequently, the extremely low incidence of ‘full time’ gigolos does provide a basis for the homogenisation of MSW experience (i.e. the more consistent focus on homosexual sex work in recent academic research), and legitimises this project’s focus on gay MSW\(^{25}\). In other words, when we speak of MSWs, it is fair to suggest that we are speaking of gay or bisexual identified men, or at the very least, the more demure term of MSM. With the terms of investigation established, this study will provide a broader outline of the male sex industry. The analysis hereafter concerns those individuals who work regularly in an official or semi-official capacity as a self-identified sex worker or ‘prostitute’\(^{26}\).

\(^{24}\) Participants were not recruited nor were data analysed (e.g. in relation to marketing strategies/advertising) from this site (www.boys2rent.com.au), due to the comparatively greater number of profiles and consistent and detailed information available on Gaydar and Rentboy.

\(^{25}\) Further to this, many participants asked of my sexual orientation during our initial contact, and gave the impression that their consent was largely attributed to this – that is, they would feel more comfortable discussing their activities based upon our shared experience of homosexuality.

\(^{26}\) This word is used solely to denote participants’ descriptions of self, as I have clearly made a case for my usage of the term ‘sex work(er)’ in the first chapter. The self-referential use of this word among sex workers has strong correlations with the notion of being in possession of a ‘spoiled identity’ (Goffman 1963). The majority of the sample preferred terms such as ‘sex worker’, ‘hooker’, or ‘escort’.
3.5 Accessibility of sexual encounters among MSM and impact on the sex trade

Before documenting the decline in trade across established forums for MSW, it is important to provide an explanation as to why fewer clients patronise these work sites. Participants in Rowe’s SHANTUSI study (2011a) offer several explanations, ranging from the increasing accessibility of casual sex at beats and SOPVs to the utility of online technology such as the iPhone application Grindr. These are salient points deserving expansion. The first concerns the lack of any need for men to pay money for sex with other men. The steady normalisation of homosexuality in Western jurisdictions (Seidman, Meeks & Traschen 1999) has, to an extent, allowed homosexual identities to achieve ‘legitimacy as an alternative within the heterosexual order’ (Connell 2002: 73). This, Altman notes, has seen many gays and lesbians enjoy greater levels of visibility and a ‘particular [social] identity that is a far cry from the stigmatised one implied in earlier definitions’ (1982: 6). As a result of this ‘destigmatisation’, it is far simpler and less shameful for modern men to indulge their (homo)sexual urges. The level of ease has further increased with the proliferation of SOPVs\(^{27}\). However, there is evidence to suggest the number of men frequenting such establishments is in decline, with the Internet and mobile applications reported as the key means to organise ‘hook-ups’ (Lee et al. 2012). In essence, closeted sexualities that formally required the services of a sex worker in any known market are now able to find sex in more anonymous (i.e. less public) forums, such as SOPVs, and in particular, online.

Technology has aided men in seeking out casual sexual encounters, not only through Internet dating and social networking sites such as Gaydar, Manhunt, Gay Matchmaker, (www.gaymatchmaker.com.au) and Squirt\(^{28}\) (www.squirt.org), but also through the extremely popular iPhone application Grindr. This application uses the global positioning system (GPS) technology built into the mobile phone to pinpoint the exact location of other gay men/MSM in the vicinity. This allows men to view the personal images and profiles of others seeking casual sexual encounters in order to assess their attractiveness and merit as a potential sex partner before negotiating a subsequent encounter.

\(^{27}\) There are three SOPVs in the inner Melbourne suburb of Collingwood alone, and busy periods may see up to 200 men on site at one time (an observation from my hours working on site as a sexual health educator as well as a patron). This allows for a range of potential sexual contacts that are both low cost (admission is usually around $20) and anonymous. SOPVs are often referred to as ‘saunas’.

\(^{28}\) GayMatchmaker, Manhunt and Squirt are exclusively dating/cruising sites and do not (officially) cater to IMSWs’ advertising.
The increase in free, anonymous sexual satisfaction has lead many men, particularly those on lower incomes who would struggle to afford professional sexual services, to ponder: ‘why should I pay for it?’. Some of the confusion surrounding this issue is captured by West and de Villiers:

One might expect the demand for commercial sex to feature even more widely in male homosexual society, given the legal and social impediments to sexual relationships between men and the fact that, homosexual activity being a minority interest, potential partners are fewer. A counter argument suggests that there are so many patrons of gay bars and discos on the lookout for a companion for the night that the need to pay should not arise (1992: 263).

While the accessibility of gay sex is an important point to consider and may account for some decline in trade, this does not imply that men no longer feel the urge to buy sex. There are many reasons men seek the services of sex workers – such as desiring a certain type of experience, image or physical attribute; finding the behavior ‘thrilling’; as well as either not wishing for or having difficulties in establishing unpaid sexual relations (Weitzer 2005: 223). Certainly, clients are a highly heterogeneous group (Browne & Minichiello 1995; Minichiello et al. 1999).

The sex industry is (as mentioned by RhED’s Christian Vega) highly adaptive to change. The male industry has weathered these changes in varying ways. In some cases, men may possess the fiscal resources to secure the regular services of a sex worker to meet their sexual needs and avoid the responsibilities that come with a personal relationship (or to a lesser extent, a casual ‘hookup’). Such wealthy clients may be on holiday or business and require a companion (a requirement some Internet-based workers seek to exploit in their advertising). Indeed, the wealth and power possessed by certain clients is a subject raised by many participants throughout this thesis.

It is important to reiterate that for many people, sex workers remain a viable outlet for the release of sexual (and emotive) energy. As explained by Jack below, some clients assume that their more specific needs will not be met unless they pay a sex worker.

At first, I started to think – like, what poof has not heard of Gaydar, or Grindr? I was actually thinking, ‘how easy is it to pick up a guy, it’s so easy to get sex’.

[So why do you think people are still paying for sex, if things like Grindr and saunas are so accessible?]

I think people, quite often, [see it as] a service…you want a massage, you can easily go and pay for a massage, but there might not be a particular guy on Grindr that you can
say ‘hey, can I have a massage’. Like the luck of the draw might not be there, but if you’re paying for a service, you get what you ask for (Jack).

Additionally, while SOPVs can provide the means for gay men/MSM seeking a casual, discreet encounter, they are not an infallible mechanism. Some older and/or unattractive men can find themselves rejected by younger men seeking equally young and attractive sexual partners. Other men may be seeking a long-term relationship or a ‘boyfriend experience’ (Haubrich et al. 2004). This is an ideal that does not correlate with the highly impersonal and detached tone of much of the interaction that takes place in a SOPV environment, where ‘sex usually precedes intimacy’ (Altman 1972: 10), potentially leading such men to contact a worker where the type of experience they seek is more readily attainable.

Another example of a situation that could lead a male to contact a (possibly Internet-based) MSW is the scenario where a suburban or country-based individual wishes to venture into the city for a night of casual sex at a SOPV or nightclub. However, when the expenses of cab fares, alcohol/drugs, and venue entries are taken into account, the guaranteed satisfaction offered by MSWs comes at a similar cost. It is likely that there will always remain a handful of men who continue to be excited by SMSWs specifically, maintaining some semblance of a street trade. Such men are thought to enjoy the feeling of ‘the atmosphere [and] being on the edge’ (Taylor 1994: 51). To summarise thus far: although free and anonymous sex has never been more available for gay men/MSM, there is no evidence to suggest that demand for sexual services has changed. Only the manner in which men choose to source and provide such services has seen transformation.

3.6 The decline in the street trade

With MSWs all but ignored in earlier accounts of sex work or ‘prostitution’ in Australia (e.g. Winter 1976), there have been few attempts to ‘map’ the industry, or to provide an overview of who is working, where, and why. These factors are relevant in the shaping of research agendas, as well as health, policy and service interventions. Such data are also necessary to provide a clear context and rationale for the exploration of Internet-based work. Perkins and Bennett (1985) were the first to detail the varying venues through which MSWs in Sydney conducted their trade at the time. The authors grouped MSWs into the following categories: street hustlers; bar hustlers; call boys; private escorts (often one or two men selling sexual services from a
rented apartment, operating as a small, illegal brothel); ‘trade’ (straight men seeking to trick or rob clients) and finally, male gigolos.

Prestage (1994) modified this characterisation of the industry with his inclusion of MSWs working in parlours\textsuperscript{29} or employed by agencies (with several said to be operating in Sydney at the time). He also noted a (then) burgeoning stripping and ‘peepshow’ scene\textsuperscript{30}, and the infrequent occurrence of MSW in SOPVs including gay saunas and sex clubs (with recent evidence confirming the current existence of such, e.g. Rowe 2011a). Prestage claims that many (although not necessarily most) males work privately, charging the same amount as the parlours or agencies. In contrast to employees of the latter, private MSWs keep the money for themselves (rarely paying tax), rather than handing approximately half of their earnings to management as is the accepted practice in legal parlours. Bimbi and Parsons offer a straightforward outline of the venues where MSW is carried out. These consist of ‘direct client-to-customer contact on the streets or in bars, mediated contact through an escort agency, and passive\textsuperscript{31} contact through the use of advertisements’ (2005: 85, original emphasis). As this thesis demonstrates, the industry has been restructured by the Internet, with a decline in street, agency, brothel and print media-based work correlating with a steady increase in MSWs selling their services online.

According to Perkins and Bennett, in 1985 when their book Being a Prostitute:Prostitue Women and Prostitute Men was published, between 50 and 100 male workers could be seen soliciting sex on the street on any given night of the week in the Kings Cross and Darlinghurst areas in Sydney. In 1994, the street scene in Sydney still operated at a similar capacity (Prestage 1994). As noted in the literature review, as recently as 2007, Leary and Minichiello described a complex social milieu that congregated around ‘The Wall’, the most notorious site

\textsuperscript{29} Brothels are often referred to as parlours, particularly where male and transgender workers are concerned.

\textsuperscript{30} While the ability for men to work as strippers at a strip club or peepshow may have been emerging at the time of Prestage’s 1994 contribution to this field of research, I have been unable to find evidence of the existence of a gay strip club scene in Melbourne at the time of writing. Additionally, I have stated that this report defines sex work as the sale of sexual services and acts between at least two individuals, a definition that excludes erotic dancing. I do, however, acknowledge the potentiality of sexual services being offered or requested in the stripping environment (see DeMarco 2007 for a detailed analysis).

\textsuperscript{31} While the Internet may be regarded as a medium of ‘passive’ contact due to the use of advertisements, as shown in the following chapter, this notion of passivity is under transformation.
for SMSWs in Sydney. In contrast to these past observations, two recent visits to locations noted by past researchers and media reports (e.g. ‘History Echoed in Wall’s Sad Trade’, The Age, March 17 2002) revealed a much depleted marketplace. At 10pm on a warm Saturday night in October 2009, only one man visibly loitered at the infamous ‘Wall’ who could be presumed to be selling sex. At 6pm on a Friday night in February 2012 there were none at all (despite the potentially lucrative conditions for street workers on both occasions). Although Sydney is not the focus of this investigation, it is noteworthy that this established scene of many years, famously the centre of male street sex work in Australia, has evaporated in such a short space of time. If the street trade has moved elsewhere, its new home proved elusive. One member of an Internet discussion group suggested that workers have moved their trade along Oxford Street; however no obvious solicitation was evident in that location either.

Leary and Minichiello argue that a recent inquiry into police corruption, alongside the use of mobile phones (as discussed below in relation to the Melbourne street scene) may be responsible for this downturn in men working the streets of Sydney:

The research was initiated soon after an extensive public commission of inquiry was held into police corruption. Male sex work was a special sub-inquiry within that commission of inquiry and, as such, focused significant attention on The Wall, those engaged in SMSW and, most especially, their clients. Court proceedings resulted; young people were pressured to testify before the commission and subsequent criminal prosecutions; clients were imprisoned; and at least one senior legal figure committed suicide. SMSW changed as a result of this complex public phenomenon. While this current study captures the SMSW experiences of a group of young males from a particular era, change has occurred, partly as a result of that commission of inquiry and greater access to mobile communication technology. Street-based sex work is now more hidden, dissipated around the city and hence a less public phenomenon (Leary & Minichiello 2007: 106).

The area around Shakespeare Grove and the adjacent Chaucer Street, located in the seaside suburb of St Kilda, has never gained the level of notoriety that ‘The Wall’ may claim. However, locals have long known the area as the hub for SMSW in Melbourne. Currently, however, these streets are devoid of any noticeable sex trade.

The former Prostitute’s Collective of Victoria’s (PCV) newsletter Worker Boy and RhED’s current quarterly publication RED have, particularly throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, featured

articles detailing happenings in the small but steady SMSW scene in St Kilda. In 2000, the City of Port Phillip (Press 2000) undertook a Street Sex Policy Review. In the report, 35 – 40 SMSWs were said to be working around Chaucer Street and Shakespeare Grove. Four years later, a journalist for The Age newspaper estimated that up to 20 men and boys regularly worked at ‘The Grove’ (Moynihan 2004). Christian Vega, former representative of male and transgender sex workers at RhED (and a key informant of this study) considered the numbers in 2011 to be around ten, or even as low as five. Despite a reasonable amount of media (and moral) attention over the years, the existence of a street scene was barely known among most participants in this study, much less the precise details of location and pricing of services.

[Before I started working] I was told by a gay male that I’d met down Grey St that he was a [street] worker, and I was like, ‘what? I didn’t know males could work [the street]’ (Jed).

I don’t know many guys who would know of a street corner where gay escorts hang out... There probably are [street-based male sex workers, but] I don’t know of any, I don’t know of anyone who knows of any, so it’s like the Internet’s just the way to go (Brian).

One of the more detailed and credible examinations of the Melbourne male street trade has come from Rowe’s 2006 report Streetwalking Blues: Sex Work, St Kilda and the Street. Rowe interviewed two SMSWs several times in-depth, in addition to female and transgender workers, and provides a male worker’s account of the apparent decline in SMSW trade in the streets of St Kilda:

Over the long term, the trade has changed. The number of guys [working] are probably still about the same. There were probably a few more guys maybe two or three years ago. Probably in total there are about 20, 30 guys working. It’s always been about that many. The real change is that there’s stuff all work down there at the moment. Ten years ago, you could go down and you’d be standing there for five minutes, hop in a car, do a job, hop out, stand on the street for five minutes, hop into another car. You’d be in and out. You’d be exhausted and call it quits and go home. But now you’re standing out there all night and lucky to get one job. I have no idea why. Absolutely no idea at all. It’s not just me, it’s the same for everyone (‘Riley’, in Rowe 2006: 133).

Residents of St Kilda living in zones where street sex work is known to take place were recently asked to take part in a survey (and for 20 residents, an interview) voicing their attitudes toward the presence of prostitution in the area. The results were compiled into a report Living Next To Street Sex Work: A Narrative (Rowe 2011b). One male resident in Chaucer Street reported a similar view to that of Riley, above, and highlighted a decrease in the number of workers:
I see less [male sex workers]. There’s less. Well, it changes you know, there used to be areas where you’d see the ‘trannies’ [transgender workers] as we use to call them, always on Carlisle Street near the corner of Barkly. The rent boys, they use to be up here in Shakespeare Grove then they slowly moved down Chaucer Street … I saw one a couple of nights ago, they’re often right across the road from my house ’cause there’s a park. There’s less of them; on a warm night, although not last year, you know, there was about only half a dozen nights where I really saw them, I don’t really look anymore, there’s just less of them; they used to be every 40 yards or something they’d have their territory … It started getting less about 10 years ago (resident, in Rowe 2011b: 20).

It appears the long-term lack of a client base for street workers is the driving force behind these changes. As demand has decreased, so has supply. Like transgender and female workers, SMSWs can only operate in areas where potential clients will expect to find them. However, there have been very few clients seeking the services of male street workers in recent years.

The SHANTUSI study reports the continuation of a ‘diminished trade’, with one worker noting that there was ‘a little bit of demand down there… [but now] you’d barely be able to get a job’ (Rowe 2011a: 32). These accounts of a decline in trade are supported by Jed, a participant in this study, although he attributes the drop to a police crackdown in the area; a theory which was dismissed by RhED’s Christian Vega.

A more sound explanation for the decline of SMSW (in addition to a decreased client base) is that new and better means to attract (and retain) trade now exist. Calhoun and Weaver (1996) list key pitfalls to working the streets: the possibility of arrest, the potential for violence, the requirement for one to have sex with those deemed ‘undesirables’ on the basis of subjective judgments made by workers, and also the possibility of not being paid for services. However, all of these drawbacks are present to some degree for all sex workers across all media (e.g. an unregistered private worker living in fear of police attention or entrapment, a brothel worker forced to service undesirable clients in order to please management). Therefore, such dangers are not limited to street workers, although the latter are – or were – considered most vulnerable to such outcomes. On the other hand, street work (particularly for females) encompasses several benefits, such as flexible working hours, ‘short-time’ jobs (i.e. a worker is engaged until a client ejaculates rather than at an hourly rate), and, consequently, a higher turnover of clients (Perkins 1994).

Although Rowe (2003) acknowledges the fact that harassment by carloads of young males rarely escalates beyond verbal insults, a SMSW in his 2006 study reported having his throat cut after providing sexual services. The victim considered his attacker to be expressing internalised homophobia. Further supporting this view of homophobic attacks posing a real danger to street
workers, Scott and colleagues (including Minichiello) note the following, although not in reference to any specific location:

The relative risk associated with working in a public setting can be better understood when it is considered that homophobic violence is typically enacted as a random street assault. Most acts of homophobic violence are perpetrated by groups of men who are unfamiliar to the victim. The victim is often alone or in an isolated setting at night (street, car park) when such violence occurs… Indeed, the study of victims has suggested the following: (a) crimes are likely to occur in public spaces, such as parks, streets, fields, or commercial establishments such as hotels; (b) those who live alone or who are isolated are more likely to suffer as victims of crime; (c) persons from a lower socioeconomic start are more likely to be victims of crime because they are more likely to live (and work) in crime-prone area such as inner-city neighborhoods (Scott et al. 2005: 330-331).

As described below by Jed, the threat of physical violence for the handful of SMSWs working at ‘The Grove’ is ever-present. This threat was also suggested by Steve, whose teenage experience as a SMSW gave him insight. However, Steve was reluctant to speak of his street experience.

Every now and then you’d get trouble down there… like people who hate gays and hate workers. Or you’d get smartarses cruising around in their car… I go with one person and that’s it. But I can never stop someone taking me to a house where there’s a whole bunch of guys waiting to bash you. Or completely rip you off and rape you or something (Jed).

Coupled with the decline in trade, the threat of violence makes advertising online an attractive alternative to street work; ‘standing’ in cyberspace rather than waiting for hours on a dark street in the elements, exposed to potential violence, for minimal remuneration. The question of how many workers have defected from the streets of St Kilda to the Internet requires an investigative analysis beyond the scope of this study, and is a topic for further research. However, RhED’s Christian Vega offers some anecdotal evidence to suggest that a handful of veteran street workers (at least) have now moved online, a real possibility given the technological advancement of mobile phone technology allowing workers to organise jobs over Grindr, Gaydar, and other websites.

These are men who are tech savvy, they don’t fit the stereotype, they’re not homeless junkies, abused victims of the world, these are highly resilient men who are resourceful, so keeping up to date, using and engaging with technology [is something they are able to do]… and that’s a reason why a certain number of them aren’t doing street-based

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33 The possibility of those individuals working alone or in isolated conditions as being more vulnerable to violence is an issue discussed in detail in Chapter Six.
work anymore, they’ve progressed, moved on, it can be [as simple as having a mobile phone of suitable design] (Christian Vega).

Vega further explained that using *Grindr* is a popular method of soliciting clients for MSWs in Sydney (potentially explaining the absence of SMSWs observed in that city, and supporting claims made in 2007 by Leary and Minichiello referring to the use of mobile phone technologies). However, he also relayed the story of a recent attempt by one of his friends to sell sex through *Grindr* which resulted in an onslaught of online abuse – an occurrence familiar to IMSWs in this study including Kent and Miles. This demonstrates the levels of entitlement that many men now feel in relation to their ability to access sex without payment, evidently angered by an intrusion into this forum designed to facilitate the acquisition of gratis gay sex.

Thanks to recent research, we know that street scenes for MSWs do still operate in the US (Kaye 2007; Ross et al. 2007), Canada (Dorais 2005), Israel (Leichtentritt & Arad 2005), Pakistan (Towe et al. 2009) and the Dominican Republic (Padilla et al. 2008). However, other reports indicate the street scene is dying off elsewhere, such as in London, where SMSW work increasingly from Internet cafés (Gaffney 2003, cited in Bimbi 2007: 29), although no evidence arose during this investigation to suggest that this occurs in Melbourne. As has been described above, working the Melbourne streets no longer offers the promise of concrete earnings from a steady influx of potential clients. Not only is the street becoming increasingly unpopular as a meeting point for MSWs and their clients, but brothel, or parlour work is simultaneously in decline.

### 3.7 The decline of the brothel and agency

Research participants indicated that brothel work is often looked upon unfavorably by MSWs, with five of the men reporting some brothel experience but expressing dissatisfaction with brothels as a workplace. Many expressed dissatisfaction with management keeping up to 50\(^{34}\) per cent of the client payments for sex (Parsons, Koken & Bimbi 2004; Prestage 1994), or even 75 per cent of the fee as relayed by Vega, despite the supposed level of safety and cleanliness that is expected of most brothels (*Consumer Affairs Victoria* 2011).

\(^{34}\)It is important to note that these sums withheld by management are not necessarily indicative of exploitation of brothel workers, but are used to pay tax and regular overheads associated with running a venue.
While clients might be expected to differ in terms of indoor and outdoor sex work, they are also reportedly different across sites within indoor work. Anthony was quick to draw distinctions between clients of private Internet workers and clients of brothel workers. He suggests that some sectors of the MSW client base appreciate the facilities offered by a brothel, particularly in respect of an individual’s inability to host.

Different people go there, and the people who call up to get a worker privately are very different to the people who go to the brothel. People who go to the brothel would never get a private person because they’re either married, or they have family, or live with their family, or have flat mates [and can’t host]. Also I think they go there because they think they should, they’re worried about getting ripped off, or giving out their phone number [and a potential breach of anonymity] because they want to be more secretive (Anthony).

Melbourne’s male brothels are likely kept afloat by such individuals, as there is much evidence to indicate that the influx of clients has slowed to a crawl - possibly due to clients’ newfound ability to ‘shop’ from home (as detailed in section 3.10).

There are only two brothels staffed with MSWs in Melbourne at the time of writing. Both establishments employ transgender workers alongside the males. Two may seem an insignificant number compared with the approximately 100 legal female brothels (Australian Adult Entertainment Industry 2010) and undermine, at first glance, the argument that MSW is not a fringe issue. However, this fact and the remainder of the data in this chapter highlight that, comparatively, MSW in Melbourne is less organised than female sex work – with a large sector of the industry based online and via informal settings.

Transgender (female) workers are often able to earn a considerable sum from sex work (Harcourt et al. 2001; McLean 2009; Perkins, Griffin & Jakobsen 1994; Rowe 2006; 2011a), even in a brothel environment where earnings are significantly ‘taxed’, as a result of their popularity with a particular clientele of ‘straight’ men (Connell 2002; McLean 2011). Given the enmity commonly believed to exist between transgender women and gay men (Goldner 2010; Jeffreys 2003; McLean 2011), MSWs may decline to work in brothels to avoid contact with the transgender workers, whose comfort and needs receive priority from management as a result of their profitability. Raymond comments:

I did check out one of the brothels... but I didn’t like the idea of having the transsexuals there.

[Did you do a shift there?]

No, I just went there to give them my details, had a look, and then never went back.
Ok. What was it that bothered you about working there?

Just the conditions. I just saw too many transsexuals there… there was just too many. And they seemed a bit bitchy as well. And the guys didn’t have what the transsexuals had; the [men’s] room was just a shed [outside], whereas the transsexuals had inside. And I didn’t see any other guys there, and I thought, ‘that’s a bit daunting’ (Raymond).

For males in brothels, work can be extraordinarily slow. Barry described waiting up to a week before he would see a client at a Melbourne brothel, forcing him to effectively live there for fear of missing out on a job. Similarly, Bailey was required to sleep at a brothel, doing 24 hour shifts, although on one occasion he was able to make AU$1000 a week for his efforts. Still, many would consider this a meager sum in exchange for being on call around the clock. Further detracting from the workplace’s appeal, brothel work requires the individual to complete a certain number of set shifts per week, without any guarantee of clients, and therefore, income.

Constant inter-personal competition within the workforce is also perceived as an undesirable brothel reality by many MSWs. All brothel workers are required to do an ‘intro’ for prospective clients consisting of a brief spiel outlining what services they perform. It is, essentially, the opportunity for the worker to ‘close the deal’. When workers must compete against one another on a regular basis in order to secure clients, it is easy to see how tensions may rise, particularly when business is as slow.

In spite of this tension, some researchers, such as Smith, Grov and Seal in their 2008 study of a male escort agency/informal brothel, reveal that intra-brothel conflicts are more likely to arise due to personality clashes, rather than comparative workloads. Relationships with other workers and management are sometimes reported to be congenial between males working together in brothels (Perkins & Bennett 1985; Smith, Grov & Seal 2008) compared with the ‘bitchiness’ of brothel work alongside the transgender workers mentioned by Raymond, or the more formal competition of female workers in brothels, for whom this type of work is more likely to be a full time endeavour (Prestage 1994) and thus relied upon more heavily to pay the bills.

While there is no in-depth, recent research available on the experiences of brothel-based male sex workers (BMSWs) in Melbourne specifically, this study’s participants provided evidence to explain why some males prefer to work through more lucrative and less restrictive means, such as independent Internet work:

As de Graaf et al. (1994) point out: brothel workers are typically harder to access as research subjects due to brothel owners’ unwillingness to allow them to participate in research and to allow researchers on premises.
I did brothel [work] for about six months. I didn’t really like it because you’d have to stay on premises for like ten hours... because there was a shortage of people who wanted to do it, because everyone just wanted to be contacted randomly by phone and they didn’t want to be trapped in a workplace. And I ended up getting really frustrated and smoking pot and getting depressed, I just couldn’t deal with it – the reason why I quit working [a straight job] is because I didn’t want to be stuck working somewhere for 8 hours a day. And they were really strict and they didn’t want you to leave, and there wasn’t much work, you’d be sitting there for eight hours a day not getting a job, because the competition was really fierce, so it became counter-productive (Karl).

In some cases brothels may be an attractive entry point for Internet-based sex workers, where a period of ‘training and apprenticeship’ (Koken, Bimbi & Parsons 2010: 206) is undertaken allowing new workers to familiarise themselves with the industry and its demands. In one study, 36 per cent of MSWs were found to have commenced their sex work careers in brothels, as opposed to 57 per cent commencing on the street (Boyle et al. 1997). These figures are challenged by the experiences of participants in this study. The proportion of participants who began their careers on the street, in particular, was much lower. It should be noted, however, that Boyle’s study was conducted prior to the Internet boom. Jared describes the utility of his brothel experience in his working life:

I originally got into contact with a brothel before going independent. A friend of mine actually worked and lived at a brothel and recommended it, which was a good way to start off, because they sort of educated me [about sex work] a bit more, and it was a safer environment, because someone knew where you were for security [purposes] (Jared).

Kent and Anthony, while working independently as IMSWs at the time of interview, both reflected fondly on their initial involvement in brothel work. Each provides a glimpse of both the ‘clashes’ and camaraderie referred to by Smith and colleagues (2008).

I like working in a brothel, like you throw a group of gay guys in a room together and we’ve all got to sit in this room for hours, watching TV – it was actually hilarious, there were so many clashes (Kent).

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Yeah some other [brothel] workers are headcases, but you do actually meet some really cool people, [I] made some really cool friends (Anthony).

However, research evidence and participants’ experiences indicate many MSWs are disinterested in entering brothel work and, if they do, only engage in this form of sex work for a

36 ‘Headcase’ is a slang term used to denote someone who is mentally unstable.
short period of time before moving to Internet-based work to reap its associated (and perceived) advantages.

Escort agencies have experienced a similar decline in patronage by both MSWs and clients. Allen (1980) defines ‘call boys’ as those workers operating from the books of a managed agency, although Perkins and Bennett (1985) define them as those who have developed a client base so extensive that they no longer depend on other sites to procure trade. For the purposes of this investigation I will be using the definition put forward by Allen (1980), referring to those individuals who are based at an agency (effectively a brothel providing services solely on an outcall basis). The introduction of household telephones following the Second World War allowed female escort agencies to flourish (Koken, Bimbi & Parsons 2010), with male escort agencies attracting the attention of researchers in more recent years (e.g. Salamon 1989).

Today, agencies range from small operations with one person handling calls via a mobile phone, through to large, professional offices (Koken, Bimbi & Parsons 2010). In slower periods where few clients make contact with the agency, some workers rely on the agency for a place to stay the night (Smith, Grov & Seal 2008), in which case, the agency becomes closer to a brothel service. Agency managers field calls from prospective clients and recommend available MSWs. They actively ‘seek to lend an aura of sophistication and glamour to their services, with escorts being portrayed as providers of ‘high-class’ companionship’ (Koken, Bimbi & Parsons 2010: 205).

The experiences of agency workers are closely aligned with those of brothel workers; therefore an extended analysis of their experiences is not warranted here. In some situations, workers are able to base themselves at home. They are, however, required to be ‘on call’ for set shifts, restricting their mobility in a similar way to brothels. Moreover, agency and brothel rates are about the same, with the agency worker often taking home only a portion of the client fee (Allen 1980), and having little control over which clients they accept (Koken, Bimbi & Parsons 2010). This was an experience shared by several participants, including Kent:

At first when I was with agencies and things, it was like ‘be at this hotel room’, and I was like [sigh] ‘ok’.

[You felt like you didn’t have a choice?]

Well, you didn’t. If you said no, the agency would [say], ‘well, if you don’t want to work, don’t work then’ (Kent).
Seven of the 23 IMSWs in this study reported some experience of working at an agency and mentioned the above as key disadvantages associated with this medium (particularly the requirement to confer up to half of their earnings to the agency). A handful of male escort agencies exist today in Melbourne, several of which are linked to one of the two aforementioned MSW brothels. Marino, writing for *The Age* in 2003, claimed to have gathered evidence that ‘two escort agencies reportedly have 25 male sex workers on call on a Saturday night’ – although it is not clear whether these agencies were independent or operating through one (or even both) of the two existing brothels.

Given the reasons expressed above and the comparative advantages of Internet-based work (as outlined below), the contemporary sex industry may witness the fulfilment of Koken and colleagues’ prophecy that: ‘as the Internet becomes a more popular and visible venue for advertising, the need for agencies as a link between escorts and clients will decrease’ (2010: 213). Just one facet of this prediction seems incorrect; rather than the growth in visibility of escorts’ advertisements leading to a decline in agency business, the online sex trade is growing as a result of workers seeking greater autonomy and remuneration.

### 3.8 Private escorts and print advertising

Not to be confused with ‘call boys’ (i.e. agency workers), the private escort is the type of worker working independently of any management or procurer of clients, and advertising via the Internet or print. This section refers to those MSWs using the local gay and mainstream print publications to advertise their services. The private worker who advertises online is unencumbered by several drawbacks associated with newspaper or magazine advertising. Private escorts advertising in print media are required to continually replace (and repay) for their advertisements, which are limited in size and content due to the cost associated with the space. Workers must prove their registration as a sex worker in Victoria with a letter and their *Sex Work Act 1994* number (SWA number), a requirement rigidly enforced by staff working for print publications. Under Victorian legislation, advertisements are forbidden to include any explicit language (e.g. in describing sexual services). While these same restrictions apply to online advertising under the *Sex Work Act*, they are not, in practice, enforced by website operators (although other regulations are, such as those specifying the types of photographs that can be used – see Chapter Six).
The local gay street press in Melbourne, including the publications *MCV* and *Southern Star*, do incorporate a section for 'escorts'. There are few advertisements each week, if any at all, for escort services. However, 37 ads for body workers featured in an October 2012 issue of *MCV*, while none featured for escorts, suggesting that print remains an attractive advertising medium for sex workers restricting their services to massage and small-scale sexual activity. To gauge the number of individuals plainly advertising the sale of sexual services (e.g. by using the term 'escort', without the ambiguity associated with body workers) that would feature in a typical gay publication at the height of print advertising popularity, issues of the (widely circulated) magazine *Outrage* were examined from the 1980s and early 1990s. Surprisingly, these featured very few escort advertisements. A significant number of personal ads featured weekly in the classifieds, although ads for the provision of commercial sex did not. This represents a difference between the Australian sex industry and West and de Villiers' description of 'numerous' escort ads 20 years ago in London, with the authors noting: 'one gets no more than a tantalising glimpse of the world of gay escorts/masseurs from their numerous advertisements' (1992: 190). Locally, Minichiello and colleagues (1999) found 67 independent male sex workers advertising in six different print publications across Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane at the time (two publications in each state), suggesting that approximately one third of these advertisements would have been based in Melbourne. It would appear the popularity of print advertising for private escort services rose slightly in the mid to late 1990s, and possibly early into the millennium, before private male sex workers turned to the Internet en masse.

Simon Glass, reflecting on his experience as a private escort in Australia, notes the short-lived nature of print advertising:

> I didn’t realise the calls would constipate to a trickle within a few days of when my ad joined the other tombs in the classified graveyard. Newspapers suffer fast, absolute deaths. Especially fortnightlies (1992: 50).

The inability to include photographs (which Vega acknowledged are crucial to attract the attention of prospective clients) is a key hindrance. Consequently, workers are required to waste time explaining their physical appearance to prospective clients over the phone: 'when they found out I was dark they wanted blonde. When they heard I was tall they wanted short' (ibid: 51).

Print does not afford advertisers the luxury of being able to withdraw an advertisement at any time. This left some, such as Kent, feeling as though they had less control over their work. The
‘tangibility’ of print advertising risks leaving workers open to identification and potential stigmatisation:

I’ve never done print media [because] you’re always walking down [the] street and queens in a café will look at the back of a magazine… not that I care, but I didn’t like the fact that that’s there.

[Ok. But can’t people pull out their laptop and do the same thing?]

Yeah, but to me – [print] seems more real, than [something that can be deleted online]… to me online is another world where it doesn’t seem as real to me as someone showing me an ad [in print] (Kent).

Print advertising is also slightly more expensive than Internet advertising, with the former costing around AU$45 per week or AU$110 a month\(^{37}\) while participants reported paying only around AU$60-70 a month for an ongoing online profile. Just two workers interviewed deemed their experience with print advertising a success. Joseph favours print publications because of the ‘more loyal clients’ it attracts, while Tom considers it to be solid exposure, particularly on the day his advertisement goes to press.

The circulation is incredible, like it hits the streets once a week and that morning I can have 15 phone calls in one day... and I think it’s because of the fact that it reaches more people, and it’s a physical document in their hand which they’re forced to read while they’re making their commute. I’ve done my ad in such a way that it’s quite bold and stands out amongst the others… usually by the time they call me asking for photos I’m able to turn that point of contact into actual sales, so...I’d say 50/50 comes from the print and the net [respectively] (Tom).

Considering the greater level of detail that can be incorporated into an online advertisement, it is unsurprising that many local MSWs prefer to advertise over the Internet. Interestingly, and without a clear explanation, the Internet has not yet taken off as a marketplace for sex work everywhere in Australia (and certainly not around the world). Print advertising in Adelaide is still comparatively popular, with around ten or fifteen ads published daily in major newspaper *The Advertiser* for MSWs seeking clients in Adelaide (as of October 2010). Yet at the time of profile analysis in September-October 2010 (and again in January 2013), there was only one Adelaide based profile on *Gaydar* compared with 47 in Melbourne and 72 in Sydney\(^{38}\). Having discussed

\(^{37}\) As relayed by a classifieds worker at the publication *MCV*.

\(^{38}\) This number is greater than the figure of 67 advertisements across 3 cities put forward by Minichiello et al. (1999), once more suggesting that a greater number of MSWs are currently working independently than they were at the time the research was carried out.
some of the pitfalls associated with traditional sex work settings, this study turns to explore the reasons for the preference of Internet-based work.

3.9 Advantages of Internet-based work

As noted in the literature review, a small but growing body of research has investigated men selling sexual services online (e.g. Lee-Gonyea, Castle & Gonyea 2009; Minichiello et al. 2008; Parsons, Bimbi & Halkitis 2001; Parsons, Koken & Bimbi 2007; Rowe 2011a; Uy et al. 2004). Uy et al. (2004) in particular analysed the reasons that a sample of IMSWs had offered for engaging in sex work, with participants responding it was primarily for the money (63%), to bolster a sense of self/confidence (28.3%), and for the enjoyment of sex (39.1%). These findings are supported by research with MSWs prior to the Internet boom (Boyle et al. 1997; Mimiaga et al. 2008; Perkins & Bennett 1985; Prestage 1994). For this reason, it is disappointing that Uy et al. (2004) do not explicitly discuss why their participants chose to advertise online – an issue separate from their involvement in sex work in general.

While Parsons, Koken and Bimbi acknowledge the benefits of advertising on the Internet, including its ‘ease, availability and relatively low cost’ (2007: 220), these reasons are not explored in any real depth. Therefore, little is known about MSWs’ personal motivations for selecting the Internet as their work site. Further, these reasons may vary with factors of context, such as historical and cultural backgrounds. These should be taken into account in any discussion of sex work to avoid generalising the experiences of IMSWs globally. This research suggests that MSWs are, generally, in a more favourable position once they commence an online sex work career, bar a few key exceptions (see Chapter Six). Ultimately, however, it is the perception of an improvement in working conditions that leads many to this medium, as opposed to a set of infallible advantages of Internet-based advertising.

Ease, convenience and accessibility

What, then, are the perceived benefits of Internet-based work? One motive for using the Internet mentioned frequently by participants was its ease and convenience. As described below, the freedom to work from the comfort of one’s own home, or location of their choice, even while
travelling, is considerably more appealing than loitering on a dark street corner, or attempting to bear the tedium of a brothel.

It's high exposure, and [with] the Internet, you’re comfortable, you’re at home, talking to people, you don’t have to be out on the streets, not that I’d go out on the streets anyway… it’s just easier, it’s busier… because everyone is on the Internet, you just get more exposure (Brian).

I think it’s just accessible; you can do it from your sofa. It’s more reliable (Sam).

I can do it all from home, or wherever I take my laptop. It’s marketing without needing to do any marketing. I noticed some kid put stickers all over Melbourne, on toilets, whatever, [advertising sexual services] and I was like ‘God, imagine having to do that’ (Seth).

As Raymond said, ‘I use Gaydar to advertise, and then they come to me’. Part of this convenience appears based on the notion of ‘clients coming to them’, rather than IMSWs being required to openly solicit for work. Still, workers providing outcalls are required to travel to each client. This arrangement is arguably less convenient than the circumstances of a brothel where workers may relax and wait for prospective clients to physically come to them - a particularly pertinent factor for the three participants who rely on taxis as their primary mode of transport.

The majority of the research sample recruited for this study offer outcalls, with some offering outcalls exclusively. Reasons for this include the need to maintain a barrier between commercial sex and private sex with a casual or long-term partner. Others perceive a security risk inherent in ‘bringing work home’. Some also avoid working from home for legal reasons, as it is prohibited to work from home as a sex worker under the Sex Work Act. Workers face fines or imprisonment if they are found to be servicing clients in their own premises, with the law viewing such an arrangement as an illegal brothel. Several IMSWs interviewed articulated their willingness to adhere to some aspects of sex work legislation in Victoria, even if they are not in possession of a SWA number (which is somewhat incongruous), through such disclaimers as: ‘[I] can’t host clients at home as technically that’s illegal’. Regardless of the travel required, working independently online enables IMSWs to work when and where they wish, as opposed to working fixed shifts for no guaranteed income (e.g. in brothel or agency based work).
Anonymity, autonomy and safety

The desire for greater levels of anonymity and autonomy have also fueled the increasing popularity of Internet-based work. Rather than providing the personal information required by brothel or agency owners in order to work, IMSWs (particularly those working without SWA numbers) are able to construct anonymous identities online and work without fear of having their personal details recorded. Further, those who wish to cease sex work, whether temporarily or altogether, are able to suspend or permanently delete their profiles and effectively cease being a sex worker from that point\(^{39}\).

You can remove those [Internet] profiles whenever you like and all of a sudden you’ve disappeared from that world… you’ve left a trace, but who really is looking up all that, who’s going back into hard drives and whatever… it’s just really, really easy and convenient. And all you need is a good photographer to come and take a few good shots (Seth).

I think – you control it a bit more, like if I wanted to take it off or whatever, or reword the ad, things like that, you can control more (Sam).

In exercising their autonomy, workers are able to feel as though they are ‘in control’, working on their own terms and not answerable to any particular authority. This perspective was captured by both Tom and Santos:

I’ve always worked independently – you’ve just got more control over who you see, when you see them, when you work. You don’t have to go and sit in a venue and wait for clients to choose you. And you make a lot more money for the time you spend as well (Tom).

I’m a lazy escort, because if it doesn’t suit me, I won’t do the job, like if someone calls me at ten at night and I’m sitting on the couch and can’t be stuffed, I’ll be like ‘nah, you should have called me two hours ago’. It’s that kind of thing; I just take it when it suits me… I don’t answer the phone, or if it’s a text message I don’t reply (Santos).

While discussing the advantages of Internet-based work with participants, the medium was typically perceived as safer than other forms of sex work (e.g. street work), primarily due to the

\(^{39}\) While some former or regular clients could still be in possession of their contact details, many of the men interviewed used a separate phone to arrange encounters and would likely dispose of it upon exiting the industry, rendering them uncontactable.
worker’s ability to collate information about prospective clients. As noted earlier, Internet-based workers are off the streets, away from potential violence. More importantly, they are in a position to research, select, and ‘screen’ clients at their own discretion. One such ‘screening’ technique involves requesting a phone call from the client to the worker so that the worker can decipher the client’s social status or class. It is assumed that the more coherent and compliant a potential client appears, the less troublesome he is likely to prove.

You can tell by the tone of their voice, how they speak, all of that. If they can’t string a sentence together, I just say, ‘nup, some other time, go away [and] try somewhere else’. And the ones who start negotiating on price, I say, ‘fine, go somewhere else’ (Sam).

Participants in West and de Villiers’ study also adopted this simple, yet apparently effective strategy, with one private worker in their study confirming that he would accept or deny clients depending ‘on what they sound like on the phone’ (1992: 230).

A phone conversation appears less productive for workers attempting to determine the nature of prospective clients (a process that several workers termed ‘sussing out’ the client) than other tools afforded by the Internet. Detailed information may be sourced from the client’s personal profile or social media presence. Workers possessing information about clients, in particular their occupation and phone number, has been reported in previous research (e.g. Minichiello et al. 1999). However, this (scant) information was usually obtained during encounters. A key difference between the online environment and traditional sex work lies in the empowering ability to acquire a comparatively significant amount of knowledge of an individual before ever speaking to them on the telephone or in person, through the viewing of client profiles (such as those listed on Gaydar). However, the validity and importance of this information must be questioned. Knowledge of a potential client’s favourite food is not necessarily helpful to a worker.

On strictly commercial/open access websites with no facility for personal dating, such as Rentboy, clients do not have profiles. Nevertheless, respondents Miles and Sam seek out a profile of every prospective client before meeting with them, and refuse the booking if a client does not provide a profile picture or is otherwise not to their liking. In this way, clients may be at a disadvantage in the online environment; particularly those who are less attractive, of lower status, or simply don’t meet a worker’s expectations, although some workers attempt to treat each enquiry equally (as discussed in Chapter Four).

40 As discussed in the following chapter, phone calls are avoided by some clients and workers altogether, with many encounters arranged via email, text and online messaging.
Sometimes, if it’s just in a call, I’ll just say, ‘what do you want? What are you after?’ If I don’t like the sound of them, I’ll say ‘what’s your profile, I can send you some more information’, just that way I’ve said their profile name and I can search for it... if somebody’s really feral you can say no, just get a sense of what they want – you can look at them, and there’s that sense of exchange first, in terms of ‘yep, I can do that, no I can’t do that’ (Miles).

You can see who’s contacting you… and if a person doesn’t have a picture and they message me, then I won’t take a booking… more for security and so on (Sam).

Jared takes the investigative process a step further. He searches for the client’s property information in order to decipher their possible class status. He prefers to service only wealthier individuals, assuming that these are less likely to be violent or unappealing than ‘working class’ or ‘poor’ men (who, according to Minichiello et al. 1999, comprise 5.9% of clients). This approach is indicative of forward planning and strategic thinking in seeking new, long-term clients.

I’m pretty selective and I’m a complete snob when it comes to clients… I do a bit of research, as much as I can on the actual client. I get the address, I Google the address, I have real estate software from a friend of mine who works in real estate which is an online program, and you can find out who actually does own it, how much it’s worth, etc. not that that should matter, I’m not a gold digger41, it’s a safety thing. How I look at it, without being judgemental or stereotypical here, if I’m going to go to say, Footscray, not that there’s anything wrong with Footscray, the person that I’m going to see is going to be of a different demographic or financial background than someone who say lives in Toorak. Someone who’s living in Footscray, they would have had to have saved the cash up for it, and won’t have it on hand. Therefore the expectation when I walk in is ‘ok, I’ve got an hour with you, let’s start right away, take your clothes off, and do this, do that’, [they want to] get their bang for their buck, so to speak. Someone from Toorak, money means nothing for them; it’s what they make in five minutes. So [they say] ‘sit down, have a drink for an hour and a half, you’re ok? Tell me more about yourself”, because they always want to know more about you, that’s when you create the story. So if you’ve got two jobs lined up, I’d rather do the Toorak job, because I know it’ll go longer, and they’ll have the income to see me on a regular basis, compared to someone who’s saved for a month to catch up (Jared).

For the more selective workers, the power to screen clients on the Internet is an enormous advantage, awarding them greater levels of perceived safety and financial security compared with that of street, brothel or agency workers.

41 The notion of ‘purchasing intimacy’ (e.g. Zelizer 2005) and the questions that surround the intentions of parties within the client-sex worker relationship are discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.
Raymond is less stringent in his selection process, content merely with ‘somebody that doesn’t abuse you over the phone’. Some participants spoke of refusing to answer calls to their mobile phones from a private number, which appears to be a common practice among the wider IMSW population. Many Gaydar and Rentboy profiles carry the warning ‘blocked numbers ignored’ (or similar). This tendency proved problematic during this study’s recruitment process. Several MSWs telephoned from RMIT University refused to answer, as their mobile handsets identified the university’s switchboard as a ‘private number’ (subsequently, these individuals were contacted by online messaging). The possession of a client’s telephone number provides the worker with some evidence of their identity (and whereabouts, if a call is made from a landline). This information alone makes participants feel safer in the knowledge that, in the unlikely event that the encounter goes awry, they could provide information leading to the identification of the client by friends or authorities. In essence, the perception of increased levels of safety is a common explanation for individuals’ decision to work online, although as the final chapter describes, individuals’ concerns for their safety are not completely allayed through Internet-based work.

**Economic gain**

While there are numerous reasons that explain the growing popularity of the Internet as a means of soliciting sex work, the most commonly cited motive is the capacity to earn greater amounts of money. All of this study’s participants mentioned during interviews that Internet-based work has the potential to be very lucrative. Several participants reported earnings in excess of AU$1,500 per week, and a few as much as AU$5,000. While some argued that newspaper advertising can be just as profitable (as Tom did), Victorian workers must provide proof of their SWA number before they are permitted to advertise in print. In contrast, neither the government nor website operators provide the necessary oversight to enforce compliance with regulations, allowing unregistered sex workers to advertise via the Internet. As Seth noted, ‘the street is crap money’ (his emphasis), while street worker Jed charges ‘50 bucks for oral and 100 for anal’. The prospect of being able to charge AU$200 per hour or more, without SWA

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42 A recent ‘crackdown’ has altered the attitude held by certain website operators, as described in Chapter Six.
numbers\textsuperscript{43} and the obligation to pay tax, or the revenue draining oversight of a brothel or agency is, needless to say, far more appealing.

I didn’t want to be dividing my cash amongst an agency… so that was never an option for me. To have some old guy who’s clearly not as attractive as me making money off me clearly doesn’t make any sense. Particularly if I have to travel to do it, I may as well just organise my own travel… I make more than my brother who is a cardiac surgeon, and I barely work. I have more free time than anyone I know… so I’m making the same amount as a surgeon or lawyer in way less time. But then they don’t have to go get their kit off and have people fuck them, so I appreciate that there’s a dual compensation going on (Seth).

I don’t want to have the pressure of having someone else tell me what to do, and sometimes working for an agency, you’re just not up for it, and they make it really difficult… plus they take a cut (Karl).

Tax evasion contributes to the significant earnings made by online male (and no doubt female and transgender) sex workers. Of the 23 IMSWs interviewed, six claimed to be registered and paying tax on their sex work earnings, however only one (Tom) was able to provide details on the processes involved. When questioned about their tax, the other five participants adopted evasive body language, responded vaguely and quickly changed the subject. Sex workers are recognised as sole operators and are expected to pay tax in accordance with regular income tax rates (\textit{Australian Taxation Office} 2012). For an individual earning AU$80,000 per year, which would involve working approximately six to seven hours a week, the taxable income on this figure amounts to AU$17,550. Clearly, the avoidance of declaring income and evading tax affords many sex workers the opportunity to earn thousands of dollars in extra income annually.

The Internet’s ability to maximise a MSW’s earning capacity is demonstrated in Jared’s experience working in the city of Dubai in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). In the months before each visit to Dubai, Jared and a friend made contact with potential clients who, after their arrival, would discreetly visit at hotels over the course of a week or two. Given the illegality of both homosexuality and sex work in the UAE\textsuperscript{44}, clients were willing to pay above typical market prices in Australia for Jared’s time. Each trip earned Jared at least AU$30,000. These trips could not have been arranged without the resources of the Internet, demonstrating the extent to which online technology has drastically altered sex work and, in doing so, raised the earning

\textsuperscript{43} While more lucrative, this practice does come at a price – see Chapter Six for a detailed discussion.

\textsuperscript{44} Article 177 of the Penal Code of Dubai includes penalties of up to 10 years imprisonment for ‘consensual sodomy’ (\textit{Gay Law Net} 2012).
potential in the industry. However, such lucrative rewards can be overshadowed by the risk and anxiety involved in working illegally – an issue explored in Chapter Six.

Kent’s quote at the beginning of this chapter explicitly communicates what many of this study’s interviewees implied – the commonsensical understanding and acceptance of the fact that the Internet is the most effective resource for initiating contact in the contemporary age: ‘we’re in 2011, this is how we communicate’ (Kent).

3.10 Client preferences and role in reshaping the industry

The evolution of the Internet as the preferred marketplace for sex workers has not occurred due to the isolated preferences of the workers. The role of the clients must be acknowledged. This section discusses the appeal of the Internet for prospective clients, estimates the nature of the client base, and continues to describe and define the context and ‘players’ within the male sex industry. While it is relevant to speak of workers’ motivations for advertising online, no such advertising could occur in the absence of a responsive client base.

For clients, the Internet is an avenue with definite appeal. Clients are able to ‘shop’ from home without having to endure (glamourised, exaggerated or outright fabricated) descriptions of agency or brothel workers over the telephone. Instead, they select a worker from scores of advertisements limited only by their personal tastes. If they are feeling bold, a client can proposition any of the hundreds of gay men online at any time with personal (i.e. non-commercial) profiles who might be willing to acquiesce to such a request. An extensive and sophisticated network of IMSWs and their clients operates online, and the demand that drives the IMSW market comes from the accessibility of electronic ‘shopping’, as illustrated below by Castle and Lee:

The increasing popularity of the Internet to conduct or manage business, communicate, gain information and purchase products provides the user with the opportunity to find the best resources for their particular need, desire and budget. The consumer can guarantee (to some degree) that they get the exact product they want (2008:118).

Given that most IMSWs only offer outcalls, clients are frequently serviced in the comfort of their own home or a hotel of their choice (if their personal circumstances afford them the ability to do so). The rates charged by IMSWs are approximately AU$100 cheaper per hour than those of an
agency, providing additional incentive for a client to select their services over those of an agency worker. While IMSWs offer a more expensive service than street workers, clients have the opportunity to secure a higher ‘class’ encounter, as alluded to by many participants (in comments that also reveal much about their opinions towards street workers and the pattern of stratification in the industry). For the well-heeled clients sought by Jared, sex in the comfort of a king-size hotel bed is likely to hold greater appeal than sex in the cramped confines of a motor vehicle or a public place. This tendency is also recognised by Lee-Gonyea, Castle and Gonyea (2009), who state that clients of indoor MSWs often have a greater desire and capability to pay more for sexual services and thus exercise some control over the nature of these services, in contrast to men seeking sexual services on the street.

According to the 2010 Melbourne Gay Community Periodic Survey (Lee et al. 2010), 3.4 per cent of the sample of 2442 men reported MSWs as their primary sex partners in the six months prior to the survey, although the mode of sex work (street/brothel/Internet) is not detailed. Additionally, Prestage et al.’s PASH study (2009) reveals that 6.7 per cent of 2306 participants had paid for sex in the past year. The evidence presented thus far suggests that a significant proportion of these encounters would have been arranged online. This is because in Melbourne, not only do online advertisements (67 across three key websites – Gaydar, Rentboy and Boys2Rent) outnumber street workers (approximately 10) and agency workers (approximately 25 as per Marino’s estimate in 2003), but also due to the incalculable number of men having tried casual paid sex online (according to Karl).

Bolding et al. (2007) consider that the Internet serves as a less-stigmatised environment for many gay men to meet, when compared with traditional venues such as gay bars and SOPVs (particularly in the event of being seen entering or leaving such a facility). Therefore, the anonymity offered by Internet services may be considered a key advantage for clients. This was certainly acknowledged by the workers interviewed, many of whom spoke of how the anonymous nature of their meeting was most appreciated by their clientele. As described in the following chapter, some workers base their entire online persona around the concept of discretion.

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45 At the time of writing, the average price charged by IMSWs in Melbourne was AU$200 per hour, while several agencies’ prices begin at AU$300 for outcall services.

46 Of course the nature of sexual appetites are varied and wide enough to make public sexual activity in whatever conditions precisely what some men may be seeking.
Strong views were expressed across the sample in relation to perceived differences between client groups according to the medium of sex work they frequented. There was a general view that clients of street workers were of an undesirable nature. As has been highlighted previously in this chapter, it is likely that those who patronise the services of street workers are seeking some kind of illicit ‘thrill’ (Taylor 1994; Weitzer 2005). Beyond enjoying the advantages of Internet-based work and a position of higher status than that of a street worker, online sex work was also considered a means of avoiding the most unappealing clients.

I’ve never done any street work, it really hasn’t appealed to me – it’s not the kind of clientele I want to attract, and I can’t see myself enjoying that kind of work (Tom).

3.11 Client types

Although no such thing as a ‘typical client’ exists, distinct trends in terms of client descriptions did emerge during interviews. Drawing on previous research with clients (Browne & Minichiello 1995; Minichiello et al. 1999) alongside interview data, client demographics are gathered here to provide some context for a discussion of their behavior in the subsequent chapter. Most clients of IMSWs in Melbourne are heterosexually identified and married, according to the research sample, although a significant proportion are also wealthy, educated businessmen who are time-poor and looking for a male companion without the ‘responsibilities associated with a relationship. Browne and Minichiello (1995) provide an inventory of client types that MSWs may regularly encounter, among them: ‘marrieds’; ‘easy trade’; ‘undesirables’; ‘sugar daddies’ and ‘heaven trade’. More specific demographics are detailed as a result of the authors’ later, diary-based study (Minichiello et al. 1999). ‘Marrieds’ signifies men who are married or in de facto heterosexual relationships, thus publicly identifying as heterosexual, and seek the services of male sex workers to satisfy their suppressed sexual desires. The frequency with which this group presents is evidenced below.

[My clients are] generally married... [aged] forty to fifty. Middle-aged married men, pretty much (Lachlan).

The ones that I meet would be between 40 and 55, they are white, most of the time, they are quite often married and have children (Jack).
Nine out of ten of my clients are married, or have a boyfriend, or they’re straight and have a girlfriend and they can’t risk me coming over. Some of them are like ‘oh, you know my wife’s ducked out for an hour, can you come over?’ So it’s risky for them (Barry).

Browne and Minichiello (1995: 608) use the term ‘easy trade’ in reference to ‘nice’ clients who are polite, respectful, and make no trouble for the worker, only requiring quick and less intensive sex acts such as oral stimulation as opposed to penetrative sex.

They’re all pretty average, like nice, kind of average guys you come across on the street. They’re not up themselves… [they’re] guys that like to spend money on a rent boy, I suppose - because they know what they’re going to get (Steve).

The experience of servicing ‘undesirables’ was also common among participants, consistent with Minichiello et al.’s (1999) finding that 83 per cent of their sample reported feeling little to no attraction to their clients. Members of the sample who presented as disenchanted with sex work were more likely to report a higher incidence of undesirables. In some instances, clients were held to be undesirable based upon their perceived character, with Barry referring to most of his clients as ‘creeps’. For other participants, such as Brian, the title of ‘undesirable’ was awarded due to the client’s low level of personal hygiene and attractiveness.

I’ve had a few clients who have been so off-putting. So very off-putting that you just, you can’t… literally, I’d vomit, or gag… I’ve had people just with really horrible bad breath, and manked-up teeth, and I’m big on dentition (Brian).

‘Sugar daddies’, as recognised by Browne and Minichiello (1995), are a very lucrative category of client for MSWs. In addition to paying for services rendered, a ‘sugar daddy’ will fund the lifestyle of a worker, thus freeing them from the necessity of seeing other clients. However, participants note that such arrangements are often unsuccessful. Three interviewees (Seth, Steve and Kent) had prior, although short-lived, experience with a sugar daddy. One participant, Jared, reported a much longer-term arrangement (see Chapter Five). The vast majority of workers are never adopted by a ‘sugar daddy’, and the experience is one where the scales of power, dominance and dependence are inequitably tipped in favour of the older man (as Browne and Minichiello caution in their research).

Lastly, the term ‘heaven trade’ refers to clients whom workers feel are physically or emotionally attractive (or both). In the same way that respondents harbouring negative feelings about sex work reported a high incidence of ‘undesirables’, those who particularly enjoyed sex work were
more likely to report experiences with heaven trade (Miles, Tom, Neil). This suggests a correlation between feelings of sexual attraction and enjoyment of sex work. As Miles reported:

There’s younger guys, who are in their twenties… there’s one guy, he’s 25, he plays football, he’s fucking hot. He doesn’t have heaps of money, so it’s easy like that – it’s not hard work in that sense. … I’d do him anyway [without payment], seriously, I would (Miles).

While these client groups appear to retain a presence in the Melbourne-based male sex industry despite the advent of the Internet, an additional category was frequently noted by interviewees. There is some evidence to suggest there is a core group of clients seeking the services of IMSWs on a regular basis, who ‘sample’ each worker advertising online while maintaining regular contact with a select few. Seth termed this group ‘professional clients’. Jack alluded to those clients ‘that have obviously done the rounds’, and many others acknowledged the existence of such a group.

I guess what people are looking for is novelty as well. I know that many of my clients have seen every single person that’s been on that [particular website] list… I just know, [given] they’re talking generally about [other workers I know personally]… so I get the idea that some guys are ‘professional clients’ (Seth).

As you can imagine it’s a small world, and once you get in the gay world, it’s even smaller, and once you get in the escorting world it’s smaller again. So everyone knows everyone, and the clients that we have, have been around for years, generally. And everyone knows and feeds off each other, like [sharing information about] what they’re like, and if we want to do them and if we don’t want to do them (Bailey).

A lot of older guys, they only use Internet escorts, and they know who’s available (Adam).

Participants reported that this group of ‘professional clients’ are likely to be successful, single, older, wealthy (i.e. have a disposable income) and often gay-identified - echoing findings reported by Minichiello et al. (1999) that 45 per cent of clients seen by their sample identified as gay, 31.7 per cent were in their forties, and 25.2 per cent were considered ‘rich’. Although these data cannot be grouped together to represent one ‘type’ of client, the evidence does suggest that middle aged, wealthy gay men have been accessing the services of MSWs for some time, even if the medium through which they seek services has changed. It is likely that busy men find it convenient to study (or scan) online profiles before deciding which worker’s company they would enjoy for the evening.
Most of my clients are like that, it’s the same story every time, they’re career motivated [and] haven’t got time for a boyfriend. Most of them are gay, they’re [often] incredibly successful and just haven’t got time to maintain a relationship because they’re travelling a lot, or work’s too crazy. And time goes past, and you get to an age where it’s just harder to find someone. It’s the same story every time (Jared).

To summarise, much like the workers, clients also appear to enjoy the convenience that the Internet affords and the relative anonymity with which services can be arranged and engaged. The online marketplace also allows clients greater leverage in seeking a particular ‘type’ of worker (especially those offering esoteric or ‘niche’ sexual practices, as described in the following chapter).

3.12 Conclusions

This discussion has provided an overview of the male sex industry in Melbourne, Australia. It has drawn attention to the extent of men’s involvement in sex work (across sexualities) and the varying sites in which they can be found. It has identified the motivations and characteristics of those using their services. Although recent US-based research (Cunningham & Kendall 2010) suggests that female and transgender workers who sell sex online signify a growth in the overall market rather than a displacement of offline markets, this is not the case in Melbourne. The evidence of this study has demonstrated that formerly stable sites of MSW in Melbourne have been displaced, and reduced to marginal positions within the male sex industry (although ‘new’ and hidden part-time populations have emerged). This displacement has occurred predominantly due to MSWs perceptions of the key disadvantages associated with each form of sex work, and the Internet’s ability to circumvent these pitfalls. Given the MSW population’s unfavourable perceptions of street, print media and brothel/agency-based work, it is easy to perceive the Internet’s inherent advantages.

Certain aspects of workers’ perspectives are irrefutable - for instance, the ease, convenience and fiscal gain associated with soliciting via an Internet profile as compared to alternative means of generating trade. However, there are consequences unique to online sex work. These consequences are the central theme explored in Chapter Six. There exists a strong client-driven demand for Internet-based sexual services associated with convenience, although further investigation of this (difficult to reach) population is needed to truly ascertain their experiences and motivations for engaging with workers online. This chapter has laid foundations for the broader claim that the Internet has reshaped and redefined the (male) sex industry. With the
question of who is present within the IMSW population addressed and the reasons why the Internet is being used to such an extent in the male sex industry explored, the following discussion analyses how the Internet is used by both clients and workers to organise encounters.
Chapter Four:
Navigating the electronic terrain

‘In designing an ad, I was just coming from the position of trying to sell sex, so it should be sexy’ (Matt).

4.1 Introduction

With the context for the evolution of the Internet-based male sex industry established, this chapter addresses the ways male sex workers use the Internet to sell their services and how clients respond to these endeavours. The investigation begins with an exploration of the marketing strategies employed by workers and their efficacy in attracting clients. Initial interactions are the second focus, and the study assesses the extent to which the Internet influences negotiations as they take place between workers and clients.

Marketing strategies have been analysed in the past by researchers (e.g. Logan 2010), particularly in a context of ‘ethnic branding’ (e.g. Phua & Caras 2008). However little research to date adequately articulates the purposes of marketing strategies, or concerns itself with the development of a personal brand as understood by workers themselves (or the extent to which they prove effective). The Internet has fostered diversity in marketing approaches, yet these primarily rest on the exploitation of individual strengths and personality traits. Workers design advertisements that are based upon their subjective understandings of the priorities in the market, and gear them to meet the perceived desires and tastes of the potential client base. The design and maintenance of an advertisement can involve significant effort. Workers invest time and resources establishing a personal brand, ascertaining a market for niche services, seeking and responding to client feedback and adopting certain masculinised stereotypes.

Despite the efforts of workers, many clients pay scant attention to these measures and base their choices instead on worker availability and the quality of sexualised photographs. The evidence of this study suggests that this practice renders many attempts by workers to design a persona redundant. However, complex Internet marketing does successfully attract clients seeking esoteric sexual practices, allowing clients to have certain needs met in ways that were not previously possible. Throughout the chapter, an argument that the development of a personal brand and online persona is a fluid and dynamic process develops. Such fluidity allows
for greater heterogeneity than may be found in other sectors of the industry due to individualised and detailed descriptions of difference, theoretically providing considerable choice for prospective clients - even if such differences are not fully appreciated by sectors of the client base.

4.2 Designing a personal brand and breaking in to the market

Shepherd (2005) considers personal branding integral to the process whereby individuals attempt to market themselves within an industrial setting. His paper, published in the *Journal of Marketing Management*, discusses the ways in which the ‘personal branding process mirrors the product or corporate branding process’ (2005: 2). Drawing upon the work of Arruda, he states that the development of a personal brand typically comprises three stages: ‘extract, express and exude’ (2005, cited in Shepherd 2005: 2). First, the individual must identify (or extract) a particular set of attributes that are in demand. For sex workers (as demonstrated by the information contained within profiles), such attributes may include their physique, sexual ‘role’ (e.g. active/passive), willingness to participate in esoteric sexual practices, age, penis size, or less commonly, educational attainment, character and hobbies or interests. Secondly, the self-marketing individual must assemble a statement to showcase or ‘express’ this set of attributes. An IMSW does this as he designs the wording of his advertisements to appeal to a certain type of client. Lastly, an individual must develop a strategy whereby they exude their extracted personal qualities and make their ‘brand’ known to the ‘market’. Sex workers can accomplish this on the Internet. Within this context, we can begin to understand the many ways in which individual IMSWs market themselves, emphasising different aspects of their persona and physicality in the interest of attracting business. While no two profiles are identical, there are distinct similarities in the types of personal brand on display. The following analysis confirms suggestions made by Phua and Caras (2008) and Koken, Bimbi and Parsons (2010) that IMSWs incorporate what they consider to be the most pertinent (with respect to their desired market) information about themselves in their profiles.

One experience shared by every participant prior to advertising their services online was an investigation of other IMSWs’ profiles (both locally and internationally), to gain a sense of how to design their own (see also Phua & Caras 2008). During this process, workers accept and reject the approaches of others in accordance with their own idealised or ‘genuine’ perception of themselves, and model the subsequent profile in accordance with the ‘type’ of client they wish to
attract. In other words, this investigative stage is when new IMSWs must decide how much they will reveal about their ‘true’ selves online – right down to whether they include a pseudonym or their real names. As indicated by the excerpt below, not all workers are impressed by the approaches of others, and use existing profiles as a tool to determine the elements they do and don’t wish to include in their advertising.

I just [searched for] 'male escorts' and tried to find as many sites as I could and just tried to look at how they wrote [their profiles] and how they operated… and I wanted to keep it more minimal. And reading what they wrote, I thought that would attract really disgusting people [and I didn’t want that] (Jack).

I certainly did a lot of research, I looked all over the web, internationally and locally, [I] had a look at different types of ads, and what people say and how they lay it out... what sort of photos they chose to include, and what kind of information they have and why they have it. [It came down to] trial and error as well (Tom).

Some workers reported drafting numerous profiles before selecting the one they felt most comfortable with, and choose to advertise on one website only. On the other hand, Tom maintains up to eight advertisements at a time, each slightly reworked to appeal to different client bases, and publishes them across a range of websites. The varying approaches to advertising reported by participants, coupled with client responses to these, inform the remainder of this chapter.

An experience commonly (and often wistfully) reported by participants was the popularity they enjoyed as newcomers to a sex working career. This honeymoon period experienced by new workers has led many to adopt a ‘fresh’ identity. Workers wishing to maintain their ‘freshness’ frequently change and/or update profiles in order to appear the ‘new kid on the block’. According to participants in this study, those advertising for the first time can expect a period of significant financial success due to their status as, in the words of the workers themselves, ‘fresh meat’ (for additional experiences of this phenomenon see Rowe 2011a: 125). As described in the previous chapter, several interviewees alluded to the behaviour of ‘professional clients’, who search constantly for workers whom they have not previously engaged for sex⁴⁷:

If you’re the new escort in town, you’re always going to do well. Well, for those [initial] couple of months, no matter what city you go to, that’s international. Fresh meat is fresh.

⁴⁷ This is not to claim that clients are predominantly interested in encounters with ‘new’ workers. Many clients seek and prefer regular contact with a certain worker(s), hence the term ‘regulars’.
meat... guys who are just businessmen; they use escorts because they can, because money’s no problem (Kent).

Many respondents reaped the rewards of their ‘fresh’ status unintentionally while starting out in the industry, only to find their appeal waning over the course of several months. This sometimes proved a steep learning curve in respect of future expectations of popularity and financial success.

When I first started, and I’ve found this with a lot of other escorts as well, you tend to get a lot of hits [Internet queries from potential clients], because you’re new… So when I first started, I was... probably clearing about two grand a week, but now it’s [considerably less] (Adam).

With experience comes the inevitable realisation that, following an initial period of unexpected (and often unrepeated) popularity, the worker will suffer a decline in demand for their services. In other words, a worker can only be the ‘new kid on the block’ for a finite period of time. To counteract this decline in demand, some workers realise the likelihood of attracting more clients if they are thought to be ‘new’ workers, and make a concerted effort to update their profiles on a regular basis. This may coincide with the tendency of participants to work ‘on and off’ for periods of time. When a worker is ‘off’ they will usually remove their profile from a website. Upon returning to sex work, they modify their profile with updated photos and personal descriptions, subsequently enjoying a resurgence in popularity.

I have on and off breaks from advertising. I just think that sometimes when you have a break and you go away from advertising and when you re-come on [sic], your business increases by about ten-fold, so it’s always good to update your photos and have a break [for] a little bit (Bailey).

The photos [on my profile] are fresh, and I try and update it frequently so that it’s always fresh (Miles).

Given that many clients are thought to patronise IMSWs regularly, pretending to be ‘fresh meat’ could backfire for a worker if faced with a client he has serviced before, although such an occurrence was not reported by participants. Further, not everyone interviewed saw the value in updating profiles on a regular basis. Kent considered such extra work unnecessary due to his perception of his remaining ‘mileage’ in the industry. In contrast, he spoke of older ‘queens’.

While the term ‘queen’ can often be used in a derogatory fashion both inside and outside the gay community to denote either a vain gay man or to highlight a lack of masculine qualities, in this context it is used to draw attention to some older men’s reluctance to relinquish their youth.
who feel a need to update their profiles constantly in an increasingly desperate attempt to attract clients.

I have changed my photos, but my actual ad I’ve not changed. My photos haven’t changed that much either because I like the photos I’ve got up. I understand the changing photos thing, but that’s usually queens in their forties who’ve been flogging their box for their whole life (Kent).

Santos was adamant about his intent to spend only a brief period as a sex worker, and failed to see the point in modifying his profile in order to attract a greater number of clients. This perspective was shared by Jack and Lachlan, who were only interested in working in the industry long enough to, respectively, pay off debts and save for an overseas trip.

Koken, Bimbi and Parsons argue that male (and female) sex workers who contribute minimal effort to their advertising often do so in a deliberate attempt to ‘distance one’s self from escorting’, particularly if the work is viewed ‘as an unpleasant means to an end’ (2010: 216). This theory is supported by the experiences of the above three workers who all, in addition to describing the minimal effort invested in updating their profiles, admitted feeling uncomfortable in their work. As suggested by Koken and colleagues, this lack of effort serves as a distancing, or dissociative technique (further discussed in Chapter Six).

Images are, arguably, the most important aspect of a worker’s profile. The importance attached to images by both worker and client may render all other aspects of the profile (e.g. text) effectively superfluous. The inclusion or exclusion of photographs showing the worker’s face can, according to Bailey, Miles, and Steve, impact upon a worker’s success in the online MSW market. However, this choice also serves as an opportunity for workers to delineate personal boundaries. The desire for privacy and anonymity often trumps the desire for financial success (i.e. by attracting as many clients as possible) in sexual service advertisement design. Those participants who do show their faces in their profiles were quick to highlight that this makes them appear more ‘honest’, in contrast to those individuals who may not wish to publicly identify themselves as sex workers and are, by implication, less honest.

[I think my profile appears] honest – because I’ve got my face there, whereas the other boys that don’t have [their] faces, sometimes they’re seen as not being honest, because they don’t want to be known for what they do… I think what makes me stand out is my look, I guess, and the fact that I do put my face photo up, because I get a lot of people...

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49 This was explicitly stated in one profile where the worker in question stated ‘[I] like doing it, but don’t want to get known for it’.
complimenting me on my face photo. I don’t know, I give the client what they want to see, really. A lot of it is revolving around the body, like [the client] could get a ‘prawn’ as we say, like a good body and a shit head. The majority of my clients don’t like that, they want to kiss and really have that ‘lovey’ relationship feeling when they’re with me. They’re not all just about sex (Bailey).

Seth offered a refutation of this equating of face shots with honesty, arguing that in obscuring their faces, workers may be perceived as ‘discreet’. Discretion is an important criterion in selecting a worker for many clients, particularly for high profile individuals seeking greater levels of anonymity.

I think [I come across as] discreet because I don’t have any face photos. That might sound like me just trying to protect myself, but I think it also sends an image to a client that this isn’t a very public affair: ‘this is private for me; this is private for you’ (Seth).

Jack conveyed a similar attitude, but while Seth provides face shots during online correspondence upon request, Jack does not. He maintains this refusal for fear of being discovered as a sex worker, and to minimise the photographic evidence remaining in cyberspace following the termination of his sex working career. The risk of being identified publicly as a sex worker is significant, as is the risk of open judgement - despite some normalisation of sex work having occurred in the gay community.

I don’t show my face, because I still go out a lot and I have a lot of friends, but Melbourne is really weird and conservative. Though it likes to think it’s not, and is really open and nice, it’s not – I find it really conservative. In Sydney, people don’t give a shit; pretty much everyone’s already done it anyway. I would show my face, because it saves time with emailing, but here, I won’t. I’ve been out at a bar and been drinking with my friends, and go up to the bar to get a round of drinks, and some guy would go up to my friends and point at me and go “he’s a porn star!” and then quickly run away before I came back. It’s just weird. And I’ve also heard other people talk about it in a discouraging way, so I wouldn’t show my face [online] in Victoria (Anthony).

This risk of recognition is greater for those who advertise on Gaydar, given that website’s popularity as a dating/cruising site for gay men/MSM. A user need only click on the ‘commercial’ tab to stumble across the listing of IMSWs, unlike specifically commercial websites such as Rentboy.

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50 This fear of identification was consistently communicated throughout interviews and is explored in Chapter Six.
4.3 Services offered and pricing of services

Several participants agreed that offering a ‘niche’ or ‘special’ service was one of the most effective ways to attract attention from potential clients. Such practices extend from kissing and massage\(^{51}\), through to obscure, taboo and fetishist sex acts. Kissing is a service seldom offered by sex workers of any gender (Browne & Minichiello 1996; Sanders 2005). This context renders kissing a novelty or ‘hot commodity’ for those clients who may be seeking an element of sensuality. However, though a worker may disclose their willingness to offer kissing as service, this does not mean they are always compelled to do so:

I don’t have any definite rule about it, but it’s a real selling point if you do… a lot of guys don’t seem to. That’s the feedback I get anyway, guys don’t kiss. So for some people that’s something I offer, because that’s what they’re looking for, trying to be a really sensual thing or whatever. So I don’t have any qualms about kissing people so long as they don’t fucking stink; there’s a few people where you wish you’d never told them that before they came over (Miles).

Steve considers providing complimentary massage services a successful marketing strategy. He offers a free 20 minute massage as an introductory offer, and as ‘an enticement’ for new clients to return. He believes it an effective practice in the sense that it is ‘something that they’re not going to refuse, [given it is a service] which other escorts would charge for’.

A significant demand for fisting\(^{52}\) exists among clients, with the majority of participants reporting that they had been asked to provide fisting services (always in the active role) at least once in their sex working careers. At the time of interviewing, such requests were willingly met by Adam, Matt, Neil, Anthony and Kent. This demand, coupled with a relative lack of workers willing to provide the service, demonstrates a niche market. Fisting requires more commitment from the sex worker than kissing or providing a complimentary massage. The potential to injure the client implies a level of skill and risk (Cohen, Giles & Nelson 2004), and workers must manage their own potential emotional and physical discomfort. Similarly, there is an established market for coprophilia, or scat\(^{53}\), which is also popular, although apparently less so than fisting. Workers who had experimented with fisting were more likely to consider client requests for scat, having

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\(^{51}\) Being affectionate and allowing kissing is referred to as a ‘boyfriend experience’ and contributes to a fixed persona or ‘boy next door’ stereotype. This is discussed below in conjunction with other stereotypes adopted by workers.

\(^{52}\) Fisting refers to the act of inserting a hand, fist and even an arm into an individual’s rectal passage. This esoteric practice requires heavy lubrication and is considered mildly taboo in the gay community.

\(^{53}\) These terms refer to sex play involving faeces.
already set a more adventurous tone in their working lives (with Anthony having provided the service on one occasion). However, not one participant advertises their willingness to provide either scat services or fisting. Instead, the inclusion of the term ‘kink’ in advertisements suffices to prompt prospective clients seeking such services to enquire.

Miles’ approach to advertising was unique among the participants interviewed. He explained how he had drawn upon the highly taboo (yet wildly popular) notion of gay incest by claiming to be in sexual relationship with his ‘cousin’ (who is actually his partner).

We’d have this back story, you know, like we first started touching each other [when we were young] and all that kind of stuff. But it was not so much a part of the interaction as it was the establishment of the interaction… [we said] that we now live together… and there was something hot about doing it together as cousins, and it worked. And so when we framed it that way – we tried to get jobs together, which we didn’t always do together, but we really played on the cousin thing. And that was probably the most successful approach with a profile [I have experienced] (Miles).

These examples of niche services illustrate the level of detail that may be incorporated into a worker’s online profile, allowing them to highlight particular services to attract clients. Such practices are impossible in print advertising where legislation prohibiting the description of sex acts is enforced, and elaborate details are discouraged by the associated costs. Similarly, a willingness to offer niche services is something that street and brothel/agency workers cannot convey prior to interaction.

While the pricing of services has already been discussed, it is worth noting that a worker’s hourly rate can be the central feature of a marketing strategy. It serves as an example of the manner in which workers use the Internet to set the terms of an encounter in ways previously unachievable. Advertising an inflated price (e.g. AU$400 per hour) is a strategy adopted by a handful of IMSWs to create an air of exclusivity and suggest that their service is of a higher standard than those of cheaper escorts. No workers charging unusually high service fees agreed to take part in this project (perhaps, as mentioned in Chapter Two, unimpressed by the relatively meager remuneration offered). Yet the perceptions of those who did participate supported this association, as well as noting the practical benefits of engaging with clients willing to part with larger sums. Seth and Jared suggested that some workers may demand higher than average prices, not only to aim for the wealthy segment of the client market, but for the pragmatic desire to receive more money for less time spent with clients. However, Seth felt that this strategy was unlikely to succeed in the long term, deeming those taking this approach
to be ‘deluded’. Anthony was of a similar opinion and assumed that an individual charging above the average would possess an inflated ego to match their inflated prices:

I don’t know, [charging too much] just seems kind of shitty, really. And it seems to be the more someone charges, the more precious they are about what they’ll do. They’ll just kind of stand there. I mean that’s fine, if they want to be worshipped, if that’s part of their thing, there are certainly people who will pay stupid amounts of money to worship someone (Anthony).

In contrast to this approach, with a rate of AU$170 per hour, Steve takes prides in advertising himself as ‘the cheapest rent boy in Melbourne, because I’ve got reasonable rates, and I don’t overcharge’. Steve’s rate, together with his offer of a free massage, is tailored to the frugal end of the market (a client group that workers such as Jared are eager to avoid). Hourly fees aside, participants noted the importance of price consistency over time. This practical priority contrasts with the flexibility commonly exercised in modifying other aspects of workers’ online personas. In other words, participants consider that frequent modification to a worker’s professional image is an acceptable practice, while the arbitrary inflation of his prices is not. This reflects the expectations placed upon public figures and companies by the broader Australian society. Santos noted an alternative pricing strategy: to exclude precise figures from advertising altogether in order to attract enquiries. In his words:

I noticed that if you take the price off... you’d get more enquiries, so at least you’d get that initial [enquiry about price] and could then hook them in (Santos).

The fact that many participants expressed opinions in relation to the rates other workers were charging (and why) demonstrates that workers pay active attention to their competition (a more appropriate term than ‘colleagues’ given the negative opinions many participants hold of other IMSWs). Such fluidity in the pricing of services could be considered not altogether removed from the practices of street or print media-based work (with brothel and agency prices being more or less fixed). However, the strength of the online environment is its ability to offer the (previously impractical) marriage of price flexibility and the freedom to construct a detailed online persona complete with descriptions of services.

4.4 Responding to client feedback and solicitation of clients

Mirroring the ability of successful entrepreneurs to remain aware of changing demands in their chosen market, Bailey, Tom and Steve consider it important to adhere to the advice and
suggestions of clients. Tom and Bailey reported to rely heavily upon this approach, highly valuing the perspectives of their customers:

I got some feedback from my first few clients – [I asked] ‘how did you find me, what made you choose me’, just general chat like that. I decided to modify my ads [in accordance with their feedback] to streamline them a bit and make them more efficient, and even now it’s still a work in progress. I find over Christmas and New Year it’s good to say something about the holidays, just to make sure they always look up to date and relevant at all times (Tom).

I have a few regular clients that keep an eye on my profile and they give me tips on what they’d like to see, and it’s good to feed off them, because you’re seeing it from their perspective (Bailey).

Clients’ perspectives on the marketing strategies of IMSWs is an avenue of research that requires further investigation. Unfortunately, as noted by Phua and Caras (2008), clients are a difficult sample to recruit for study due to the clandestine and private nature of such transactions.

Bailey once presumed that in stressing the superior quality of his services compared with those of the other advertised men, he would appear more professional to potential clients. However, he removed remarks criticising other workers’ practices from his profile when several clients recommend that he not ‘slag the other boys off’, as it made him appear judgemental and mean-spirited. Kent was encouraged by clients to change the images in his profile in order to shift the focus from his large penis and flaunt a different asset – his smile.

I have had input from people saying ‘oh, you should change that picture, I love that’ and so I would – if I agree with them. There was this one guy... and he almost critiqued my [profile]. He said ‘you have a beautiful smile, you should have some pictures of you smiling’, and he was this lovely guy who used escorts a lot, everyone had done him if you said [something about] that client in Geneva^{54}. And I changed my [profile] and I could say that there was a good response like ‘oh, that’s a really lovely picture’ (Kent).

Such modifications serve as an example of the interactive processes often involved in the design of marketing strategies for the online male sex trade, and demonstrate again that workers do not formulate such strategies in isolation. As Bailey explained, responding to useful feedback led to ‘making [the advertisement] more sensual’ (an approach shared by Miles and Steve with kissing and massage respectively), and ‘making it more classy’, in order to attract

^{54} This suggests that a group of ‘professional’ clients may exist beyond the local context.
‘the rich, rich regulars’. However, opinions vary among clients (and workers) as to what constitutes a productive profile. This is to be expected given the heterogeneous nature of both clients and workers, and is demonstrated by the diversity of the latter’s marketing strategies. Bailey was advised to ‘keep it simple’, while several of Steve’s clients had commended him for the level of detail in his profile design.

[A few have said] that [my] profile stands out more than the other guys out there... which it does really, [because] some profiles have got like one or two little things – [they’re] really, really brief, they don’t go into it all. Whereas with me, I like to explain before [I meet a client just what they can expect], so you get a good feel of what I’m into … It’s about more what I’m into, so the guy knows it’s ok, just so the client knows that he’s going to get what he wants. It’s all written there in plain and white [sic]. He ain’t gonna ask questions about it, you know. He’d know, straight away [what is and what is not acceptable] (Steve).

From Steve’s perspective, more information eliminates the potential ‘hassle’ of clients making extensive enquiries, and provides the client with a clear idea of what they might expect from the worker and the encounter – even if only a handful of clients actually refer to his profile. The belief that the effectiveness of a profile will increase with its level of detail is based on the assumption that most clients seek personal information about the worker prior to making a booking. As is discussed below, there is evidence that many clients ignore or ‘gloss over’ such information rather than read it at length. This appears to render much of the effort IMSWs expend in designing profiles unnecessary (although it may assist with skill-building and defining their place within the sex industry). This practice suits workers of the mindset that ‘less is more’; an attitude sometimes adopted due to the worker’s own tendency to ignore the textual details of other workers’ profiles and their assumption that clients will do the same.

I figure I can never be bothered reading somebody’s profile who’s got paragraphs and paragraphs of text, so I guess I figured nobody would bother reading mine if I had that there… I mean I guess there’s always people that would, but I just wanted mine to be simple and to the point (Matt).

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[When] I look at profiles; I just generally look at the photos, the price and maybe the location, as the main things… I think a lot of people just couldn’t be bothered spending too much time reading profile information, but I think you should have basic information there, because I think people will just go to the next profile [if there isn’t adequate information there] … I think it works for me [to keep it succinct and specific] (Joseph).
A number of participants reported drawing upon the feedback of clients in a more explicit way than merely accepting advice as to how they might improve their profile. Several workers included reviews\textsuperscript{55} from past and regular clients, linking these to their profiles so as to entice additional clients through the positive feedback of others. Similarly, workers with porn experience\textsuperscript{56} (Jared, Anthony, Kent) posted links to web pages where clients could access pornographic photographs. This strategy of redirecting clients to another site where they could read of others’ sexual experiences or view pornographic images of workers ‘in action’ is an effective means of skirting around the legislative prohibitions regulating the use of images by IMSWs (these regulations are addressed in the concluding chapter). Additionally, participants consider that the inclusion of links to reviews/porn websites lends an air of professionalism and authenticity to their online personas.

I noticed one guy has his own Facebook page setup, [saying] ‘over here for more photos’, which I thought was really different. They’re still not face photos, just body snaps. But I think the website [I’ve constructed] makes me look a bit more high end, you know, [clients think] ‘wow, you got your own website; you’re not just some poor uni kid\textsuperscript{57} trying to make a couple of extra bucks’. And when they get to meet me I can sort of create whatever they want me to be. And everyone’s really nice, and gets along with me pretty well. I think that if I didn’t have my own website and just had a plain profile, with a shoulder photo or just a quick snap, I don’t think I’d get many calls or enquiries, at all. And I also think I’d get rejected a lot because I don’t have the build they’d expect me to have, the big, muscular sort of build (Jared).

Reviews on external websites cannot be modified by workers, leading some to reconsider providing links due to concerns that potential clients may be ‘turned off’ by reading of a worker’s involvement in the provision of more extreme services:

Some things can scare people off …with the majority of the reviews I have, they all involve pretty hardcore scenes – like rape, or torture. I think only one of them says ‘he was a really nice guy and turned up on time’ … I think that has turned people off, so I’ve toned it down to just physical descriptions, not everybody wants that [extreme level of detail] (Anthony).

\textsuperscript{55} These were, as relayed by participants, authentic reviews as opposed to false ones fabricated by the worker, which could be used by workers as a marketing strategy in the absence of genuine reviews. Client reviews are discussed further in section 4.6.

\textsuperscript{56} This varied in nature from a few local and isolated jobs (Anthony) to an extensive international catalogue complete with a highly publicised porn persona and website (Jared).

\textsuperscript{57} This ‘poor uni kid’ stereotype is discussed in section 4.5 below.
There is no evidence to determine whether ‘less’ or ‘more’ profile information consistently leads to greater patronage. Each participant is likely to display a bias towards the success of their own approach. The significance lies in the ability to choose. Choice is the gift of the Internet, and each individual’s selected level of detail assists to construct the array of choice awaiting prospective clients.

Another unique strategy afforded to IMSWs by the online medium is the ability to solicit jobs with clients they have never met. A function on Gaydar known as ‘tracks’ allows users to view the profiles of individuals that have previously viewed theirs. ‘Tracks’ is available to both commercial and non-commercial users. The conduct of the research for this thesis required frequent browsing of profiles on Gaydar, both to secure interview participants, and also in order to gain an understanding of profile characteristics. On several occasions, after viewing the profile of a worker, that worker contacted me with a friendly message such as ‘hi, how are you?’ or ‘want to hook up?’. I would respond to these messages by sending my phone number and clarifying my research intentions. Each of these workers denied or ignored my request for an interview. Miles was the only study participant who admitted to soliciting clients in this fashion. The practice of soliciting through ‘tracks’ modifies the Internet’s status as a form of ‘passive contact’, as denoted by Bimbi and Parsons (2005). Rather than placing an advertisement and waiting for clients to ‘come’ to the worker (as suggested by Raymond in the previous chapter), there is an opportunity to openly solicit potential clients online - even if only a small number choose to do so. This constitutes another example of how sex workers may exploit the Internet for financial gain in a manner unavailable to other sectors of the MSW population.

4.5 Stereotyping in IMSW advertising

In the virtual sphere, the traditional modes of the enactment and embodiment of masculinity are transformed across men’s bodies. The body’s function as an arena for the enactment of masculinity is well documented, most notably by Connell (1995; 2002) and Dowsett (1996). A range of stereotypical categories exist in gay social life, and gay men frequently draw upon these to establish identities for themselves and for others. Such categories reflect physical presentation (size, body shape, hair colour, and attire), sexual identity and sexual practices and have been referred to as ‘sex types’ (Gage et al. 2002). The majority of Internet profiles of MSWs draw upon these gay and masculine stereotypes actively. It is a subtle process, dependent on the strategic use of photographs or lines of text.
In keeping with a central question asked by Logan (2010), albeit from a qualitative perspective, this section examines the roles and behaviours that IMSWs enact in order to be successful in the sex industry – a success largely defined by the worker’s ability to attract clients. The stereotypes discussed in this section include the ‘hyper masculine’, sexualised ethnicities or ‘exotics’, the ‘poor uni student’ and the ‘boy next door’. The discussion develops a typology, which is a research framework identified as obsolete in Chapter One’s literature review. In this case, however, the categories generated are in accordance with participants’ descriptions of themselves, removing the arbitrary and pathological nature of past typological studies.

The interview data and physical observation of participants demonstrate that those who do use stereotypes exaggerate their most marketable traits from a commercial perspective (e.g. friendly disposition, muscular body) and ‘extract’ these (as described by Arruda 2005, cited in Shepherd 2005: 2). Such traits then become part of a caricature that informs their sex worker persona or identity. Workers are generally aware they are ‘acting a part’ and the character they adopt is an essential part of their business persona. This practice reinforces the idea that the negotiation of a sex-working and non-sex-working identity is an ongoing process (Hendrix-Sloan 2009; Sanders 2005).

The ‘hyper masculine’

Hegemonic masculinity, despite its historical positioning of gay men as ‘subordinated’ (e.g. Connell 1995), can also operate within the sphere of homosexuality by valorising and subordinating certain displays of gay masculinity. Kinsman (1995) posits the concept of a ‘masculinised gay image’ as having its origins in the period following gay liberation in the late 1960s and 1970s, whereby many gay men sought to dissociate themselves from the notions of femininity that often coloured mainstream (i.e. negative and homophobic) perceptions of their lifestyles (Jeffreys 2003). A ‘hyper masculine’ identity, or hegemonic masculinity, is highly coveted within the gay community (Bersani 1987; Logan 2010). Browne and Minichiello consider male sex work ‘an exemplary site where men struggle to create their own images of “masculinities”’ (1996: 87), while Scott recognises that this population has been ‘organised and hierarchically ordered with reference to contemporary cultural constructions of masculinity’ (2005a: 188).
Scott claims that hyper masculinity in male sex work has been premised, by researchers, on the ‘possibility of identifying and describing effeminate classes’ of male sex workers (ibid: 184). This echoes Connell’s (1995) idea that masculinity is relational – that is, it cannot exist without a contrasting element (i.e. femininity). A significant proportion of IMSWs embrace the potential to capitalise upon notions of (relational) masculinity through personal branding and adherence to (appealing) stereotypes. One profile proclaimed that, ‘those who want to experience what it’s like to be with a hot masculine guy’ would be well-satisfied by his services. This statement carries the assumption that most gay men are effeminate, and that sex workers are able to provide a contrasting masculine experience. This reinforces Dowsett’s view of the MSW as an ‘object’, embodying ‘sex in a way different from that of women for men or gay men for each other’ (1996: 243).

Consistent with Logan’s (2010) quantitative analysis, masculine, muscular ‘tops’ were perceived by many participants to possess the most desirable and marketable characteristics available to a male sex worker. A smattering of evidence arose to contradict this claim, with some participants reporting broad experience with clients who prefer conversation and emotive connection over brawn:

They’re usually guys in their mid thirties to early fifties, and most of them are married, lots of them don’t even want to have sex, they just want to cuddle or talk, and you know, get hand jobs and stuff. A lot of them haven’t done this before, or they had before they were married and that was like 20 or 30 years ago. Lots of them do want to have sex as well, but not all of them do, they just love spending time with a young boy or whatever (Barry).

[The clients], they’re not sexual predators in any way; they’re just normal people who are a bit lonely and just want company in some way. They don’t want people who are just going to be there moaning and groaning – because it’s fake, they don’t want that (Bailey).

Though a portion of the client base may be disinterested in ‘sculpted’, masculine men, research participants who felt their bodies failed to meet the ideals of hyper masculinity demonstrated feelings of inferiority. Adam reported considering it necessary to lie about his sexual role in order to attract a greater number of clients, while Miles lamented his inability to conform to hyper masculine ideals.

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As mentioned previously, ‘top’ refers to the active, or insertive, sexual partner.
I’m generally – I advertise as a top, which is bullshit [laughs]. I’m very versatile…because I think that’s where the money is [but] I’m still working this out at the moment; I need to talk to some escort friends of mine who are advertising as bottoms, and see how much money they’re making. I don’t know, I guess I try to come across as being [as] masculine as possible (Adam).

A lot of people can play on the body builder, strong man, that really masculine thing [but I can’t]… there are people on [the websites] that just have the most amazing bodies. I don’t have that, clearly. I’m not the best looking guy on there at all (Miles).

The masculine image generates scrutiny. Respondents found to be employing masculine traits for the sake of success in the market were the most likely of the sample to critique the credibility of other workers’ masculinities as well as their own, and to ignore the potential for gay men to be legitimately masculine.

I don’t know where these gay guys that think they’re alpha males come from, they’re gay for fuck’s sake. [They say] ‘I like masculine men’ and I say, ‘yeah, so do I, but chances are you’re going to have some effeminate trait’ (Seth).

Neil, who advertises as a ‘hot tradie’ (tradesman), offers a particularly interesting example of dubious masculinity. Although Neil has never worked as a tradesman in his life and admits to having ‘very soft hands’, he attends each job dressed as if arriving from a construction site (e.g. in overalls and work boots), and presented for his interview in such attire. Neil reasoned that he dressed that way ‘just in case’ he was called to a job while away from home, although his manner suggested he had assumed elements of his working persona in his personal life.

The ‘poor uni student’

Marketing strategies involving the stereotype of the ‘poor uni student’ are adopted by workers who hope to elicit sympathy from potential clients, or to appeal to those clients seeking an element of control in their encounter. This latter function sexualises the alleged poverty of the worker as a form of power play and renders the adoption of a ‘hyper masculine’ identity impossible. At the time of analysis, four of the 47 profiles listed on Gaydar (9%) mentioned sex work as a means to fund university studies. Barry was the most cynical of participants in respect of this approach, doubting the authenticity of such profiles:
They do it to make more money, [so the clients will think] ‘oh, this poor kid, it sounds like he needs some money, plus he’s hot, might as well pick him’, you know, it gets those votes (Barry).

While Lachlan admitted mentioning his studies in his profile, and responding to study-related questions from clients in encounters (signifying that it may serve as a focal point for the client), he did not allude to exploiting it as a marketing strategy. Miles, a perceptive, intelligent and cynical individual, summarises how workers like Lachlan are sometimes oblivious to their passive adherence to stereotypes, inadvertently generating a marketable ‘identity’.

It’s not [necessarily] submission but they play the whole ‘dumb blonde’ thing… there are people playing on all these different types, stereotypes… and you can see them… I’d say a lot of them don’t actually realise that they are playing on a stereotype. Some of them are really cautious and conscious of how they frame themselves, and I think some of them aren’t - [they] don’t realise how they’re framing themselves (Miles).

This strategy steers the image of MSWs back towards their earlier constructions as downtrodden, disadvantaged and powerless - quite at odds with the image of the (mostly) autonomous, astute, and well remunerated individuals who volunteered their time for this thesis.

The ‘exotic’

Similar to the Brazilian escorts featured in Phua and Caras’ 2008 study, several workers interviewed described how they would purposely emphasise their ethnicity in order to invoke stereotypical sexual associations and increase their chances of servicing a niche demand. This strategy also met with criticism, particularly from those participants embodying hegemonic masculine ideals such as Seth, who felt as though ‘exotic’ ethnic groups did not represent competition:

There’s clearly that whole exotic thing, and this is going to sound awful, but just say there’s 15 profiles, then I’ll go ‘Asian, Asian, [I’m] not competing [because I know as an Anglo I’m more popular]’ (Seth).

Seth’s views further underscore the hostility between workers that pervaded nearly every interview. Logan (2010) notes that Asian IMSWs may suffer financially as a result of their ethnicity and associated sexual stereotypes. While Asian men are often constructed as ‘exotic’, a stereotype of passivity and femininity inhibits their success in the MSW market, with most clients thought to favour ‘tops’. According to Logan, ‘Asians are expected to be passive’ (2010:
Logan’s quantitative analysis examining escort profiles reveals very few Asian men advertising as the active partner, suggesting his assessment of their status may be accurate.

In a qualitative study, however, such conclusions can be challenged and nuances observed. Tyrone, a young Singaporean, considers himself a strict top and popular with clients, although he does enjoy receptive anal sex in his relationships. Tyrone did not speak in interviews of frequent client demands that he ‘bottom’ in encounters, suggesting that clients seeking his services are aware and respectful of his work practices. This may be attributed to his larger physique and forward manner, at odds with the passive stereotype. In contrast with Tyrone’s experience, several participants of Asian descent openly expressed their perceived unpopularity and appeared complacently resigned to it. Joseph and John each noted that the best they could do to circumvent racial stigma was to state their ethnicity clearly in their advertising (despite such statements in advertisements being an explicit violation of Victorian law) and initial communication with potential clients.

The image that I try to portray – my selling point is obviously that I’m young, athletic… in advertising I kind of just have a body shot, so it shows off my chest, and I do have a butt shot, but I guess the age and my ethnicity – a lot of people ask ‘are you Asian?’ which I guess can either go for you or against you depending on the client… usually I’ll tell them I was born in Australia but have Asian heritage (Joseph).

I decided to put that I’m Asian, because as you know, in the gay scene it’s very segregated, so if they see that [and they find Asians unappealing] they know not to contact me (John).

A focus on ethnicity can also function as an enticement to clients. Santos, another worker comfortable with emphasising his perceived strengths, once chose to exploit the ‘Italian Stallion’ stereotype in his marketing, encouraging clients to view him as an ‘Adonis’.

That’s who I am, you have lots of different types of guys, and some guys are attracted to that ethnic, European type of thing, some people aren’t, they want white, blonde, blue eyed, smooth body. So I think it’s good to work with who you are, and – because people have types. When I first started I had long, curly locks, I just recently shaved my hair, so it sort of went along with this Mediterranean sort of [Adonis figure] (Santos, my emphasis).

This was chiefly due to their experiences in the broader gay scene, where Asian men suffer racial discrimination as well as sexualisation, encompassed within the term ‘rice queen’, which is used disparagingly to denote an Anglo gay man predominantly interested in Asian men. For in-depth accounts of these issues, see Ridge, Hee and Minichiello 1999 and Caluya 2006.
An individual’s perceptions of their strengths, or most marketable traits, is informed by their value system as well as their attitude toward sex work. In the passage above, Santos equates the stereotype and general physicality with ‘who he is’, blurring the line between his sex working and non-sex working identity. Throughout his interview, Santos continually referred to the physical aspects of sex work only. He found conversation with clients to be ‘weird’, uncomfortable, and unnecessary, and understood sex work in the most literal sense: money for sexual services, nothing more, and nothing less.

The ‘boy next door’

In contrast to Santos’ distanced view of the trade, constructing a ‘boy next door’ persona demands commitment and introspection. As demonstrated by study participants, this approach requires comfort and enjoyment of the work, and more than the mere willingness to kiss (as discussed earlier in the chapter). Koken and colleagues (2010) summarise these practices as providing a ‘boyfriend experience’:

The primary advertising strategy for women and men specialising in more companionate, ‘girlfriend’ or ‘boyfriend’ experiences involves presenting an idealised version of one’s actual self… an escort works to closely align client expectations with their own personal preferences. These women and men aim to offer sessions that closely resemble a date, one that is pleasurable for both escort and client (Koken, Bimbi & Parsons 2010: 213).

This thesis uses the term ‘boy next door’ in keeping with the language used by participants. Bailey, consistently seeking innovative marketing strategies, reported trying to sell an ‘overnight experience’ for a six month period, offering clients a service (for a fee of AU$1500) where he would visit the client in their home and cook dinner, followed by an overnight stay. This overnight package is an example of sex workers utilising their personal strengths as marketable characteristics, as Bailey is a qualified chef and confident in the kitchen. However, Bailey reported receiving just one enquiry about this offer. He suggests that the lack of interest may be due to clients seeking a less prolonged and intimate experience:

Generally guys are either married and they’re business men and they just want to [have sex]... from my experience, if they’re married, they come in, and once they get off they feel guilty and they want to leave. So if they’re stuck there for the whole night, it can be a bit of a burden on them… it was interesting that it didn’t work, it really just hit home that, you know, guys just want to fuck and that’s about it (Bailey).
Perhaps the futility of Bailey’s abandoned marketing strategy lies in the hefty price attached. Wealthy clients may feel the offer represents poor value for money, while others may not have the resources to afford the overnight services of a worker. Rather than providing grand gestures of culinary delights and romanticism, Bailey now considers it important to cater to those who ‘just want to fuck’. He is able to provide this service while being friendly, personable and even affectionate, as a ‘boy next door, American jock kind of guy’. Yet Bailey’s acceptance of what (he believes) clients expect from his services contrasts with Miles’ view. Miles believes the majority of clients are seeking a more personalised encounter, or ‘boyfriend experience’ as opposed to ‘a fuck’.

They all want to be your boyfriend, not all, but a lot, and they want to think that they’re the only one, and all those kind of things which come with the territory (Miles).

One explanation for this discrepancy, in addition to the diversity of client demand already noted at several points, is that Bailey reported seeing his clients merely as ‘dollar signs’. In contrast, Miles claimed that he would continue to see a number of his clients in the event that he ceased his sex work, reporting that he genuinely likes some of his clients and enjoys their company. Perhaps it is this difference in outlook that explains such divergent relationship experiences. Clients who detect the more calculated and artificial approach taken by Bailey would be less inclined to make an emotional investment.

The physical aspects of this stereotype (a toned down ‘boy next door’ look) are easier to accomplish and maintain than the muscular frame of the ‘hyper masculine’ MSW for individuals such as Jared and Miles.

I’m not muscled; I’m skinny, lanky, white kind of guy, no muscle at all... So I thought, I’m going to market myself as the ‘boy next door’ guy, but somebody that’s done porn and has professional photos still (Jared).

I don’t have all the muscles that the other guys do. I have to work with what I’ve got, and just make my profile more about fun, and being friendly (Miles).

Four participants spoke of employing this stereotype, with Joseph reasoning that it offered a ‘nice’ alternative, and was generally good for business. His ability to combine the ‘boy next door’ with the ‘exotic’ stereotype indicates that these personas need not be mutually exclusive.

The way I kind of market myself is it’s more like it’s a unique experience, and it’s sensual, you know it’s a nice environment, it’s going to be nice and comfortable, [I’m]
friendly, more those angles than say maybe someone who’s looking for a certain type of fantasy, like a tradie or something like that (Joseph).

To summarise, the design and implementation of marketing strategies is a conscious, ongoing and fluid process engaged by IMSWs (and to some extent, their clients). This process allows workers flexibility and control over their working persona and practices in ways that have previously been impossible. Workers employ an eclectic assortment of personal and physical traits to meet the equally eclectic demands of prospective clients.

Advertisements often mirror an individual worker’s beliefs regarding the dynamics of sex work, and the nature of the market. This brings diversity to the marketplace, built on subjective and competing understandings of what is popular, and just as importantly, what is not. While a significant amount of effort may be invested in this process, it is important to address the outcomes that may arise. Are these efforts rewarded? To what extent do clients respond to the information with which they are provided? The remainder of this chapter engages with these questions, examining initial interactions and the ways clients use the Internet to establish contact with workers, respond to their strategies and personas, and institute the terms of an encounter.

4.6 Client usage of the Internet in securing an encounter

As discussed in chapter three, there are a number of reasons that clients find the Internet a more attractive marketplace for sexual services than other venues. While many workers have achieved some mastery in their usage of the Internet, the same can be said for sections of the client base. Some client engagement with this medium and milieu appears considerably more extensive and sophisticated than simply browsing the pages of Gaydar or Rentboy. It is uncommon for men to review MSWs and their services in the manner that clients of women frequently do. Female sex workers are reviewed on vast websites built specifically for the purpose, such as the International Sex Guide (www.internationalsexguide.info) which provides information on nearly every city in every developed, and some developing, countries around the globe. A specifically US-based website, The Erotic Review (www.theceroticreview.com) carries more than 500,000 reviews rating the services of an estimated 94,000 female and transgender sex workers (Cunningham & Kendall 2010). However, some reviews of IMSWs do exist - as workers’ employment of their own reviews as a marketing strategy has demonstrated, and as discussed by Lee-Gonyea and colleagues (2009).
Perhaps the best-known website for the reviewing of male escorts is *Daddy’s Reviews* (www.daddysreviews.com), which claims to be ‘dedicated to reviews of interest to mature gay gentlemen’. The overall tone of the men posting the reviews on this site is more respectful than those on the *International Sex Guide*\(^6\), with several posters expressing concern for the welfare of the worker they reviewed (e.g. ‘I hope he finds a job he’s happier doing soon’). The existence of reviews suggests that some clients do seek information concerning particular workers beyond their self-presentation online. Prior to the Internet, such considerations were impossible beyond the occasional, highly surreptitious word-of-mouth recommendation.

For less seasoned clients, (i.e. not the ‘professional clients’ described in the previous chapter), using the Internet consists primarily of viewing the profiles of IMSWs and making contact with the desired individuals. Primary modes of contact reportedly vary. As stated previously, the IMSW does bear a resemblance to the worker advertising in press, but only in the sense that he may be contacted on the telephone as a result of a potential client viewing an advertisement. Not only does the IMSW control the means of delivering significantly more information to a prospective client (beyond the one or two lines of text in a newspaper ad), he also has electronic tools (e.g. *Gaydar* messaging, email, mobile phone text and picture messages) at his disposal which allow images, a pivotal aspect of such an exchange, to be delivered to or traded with the client. Indeed, for study participants using *Gaydar*, online messaging proved a more popular means of contact than the telephone, due to its perceived immediacy, with Miles and Matt reporting that phone calls comprise only a tiny portion of their initial contacts. For those still advertising in print (as well as online), such as Tom and Joseph, where the only contact details provided in the print advertisement is a phone number, more text messages were received than actual calls. Additionally, clients often provide an email account where photos can be sent, demonstrating the intrusion of technology into the print medium.

The telephone’s role in the arrangement of encounters is becoming dubious, although the reasons suggested for this varied between workers. One noteworthy reason, not mentioned in interviews, is the potential for electronic communication to relieve the anxiety that a prospective client (particularly a ‘first timer’ or shier type) might feel about making a phone call to a sex worker, allowing him to feel more comfortable behind his computer screen. Further, online conversations can be carried out with the assurance that neither party will be overheard. In fact, a worker’s phone number is not always made available to the client. Lachlan disliked the idea of

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\(^6\) This forum is dedicated to clients of street, brothel (illegal and legal) and private workers worldwide and misogynistic and derogatory descriptions of workers are sadly common.
having a telephone ringing at random times and did not provide a number, thereby forcing clients to initiate contact with him over Gaydar’s messaging system.

We do the whole thing over Gaydar, and I do give out my phone number eventually, and it’ll be a text thing, they don’t generally call me. I don’t generally take calls either if my family’s around (Lachlan).

Before any sexual services may be negotiated, the most frequent client expectation or demand centers on a worker’s availability. When questioned as to what information clients typically seek about the worker during initial interactions, most workers reported ‘are you available now?’ to be one of the more commonly asked questions. This sense of immediacy is an explicit example of the need for instant gratification that is frequently and stereotypically associated with male sexuality. It also indicates the rushed and clandestine nature of many clients’ needs—particularly in the case of ‘marrieds’ (e.g. needing to maximise the limited time they may have alone).

Usually when I get a message on my Gaydar it’s either ‘are you available now’ or ‘I’ll be in Melbourne next Monday, can we book in [at] like 8.30 or something?’ (Barry).

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Usually I get a call about ten o’clock at night asking if I can come over at 11, generally that’s what time they want me there (Lachlan).

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The majority of it is online messages, and most of it is [asking] ‘are you available now?’ or ‘when are you available?’ ‘How much?’ and ‘pictures, more pictures please’. So I generally go back and tick all of those boxes, saying ‘yes I’m available now’, or ‘I’m available weeknights and weekends, here are the incall/outcall rates, and here’s some pictures’ (Matt).

While participants such as Santos and Jack expressed unwillingness to acquiesce to requests for immediate service, whether it be because the worker was tired from their day job or simply ‘not in the mood’, other workers including Seth (a self-described ‘greedy’ worker) and Miles would attend such calls. Tom and Neil would insist the client make an appointment, and were unwilling to drop everything to attend a job immediately. Demands for immediate attention suggest clients imagine that workers are sitting at home waiting for the phone to ring. Whenever

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61 This is a common policy and as noted in the methodology, I had to message many workers over Gaydar throughout the recruitment process due to the absence of a phone number.
Seth’s phone rang while he was attending another job, he invented a story that made him appear ‘a busy individual’ with a day job, as opposed to being constantly available for sex. Seth’s experience indicates that for some workers, the act of constructing an alternate persona is constantly engaged.

The other thing I don’t like to do is to present an image that I’m constantly having sex. Because I don’t think that’s particularly [attractive], like I’m sitting around in a boudoir and people are just coming to me and having sex. Whether or not it’s true, it’s not an image I want to present. And if I’m late because I’m with a client or something, I’ll invent some sort of thing that makes me seem like a very busy sort of individual, like I’m an article [legal] clerk or something (Seth).

Joseph and Miles noted the tendency of clients to use Gaydar’s ‘who’s online’ function in order to locate a worker that is ‘ready to go’ immediately, reinforcing the desire for instant gratification on behalf of the client base. Both workers found they were able to procure more trade by being online more often as a result of this behaviour.

A consequence of broader technological change lies in the hyper-accessibility of men’s bodies. The best example is Grindr, an application that places users permanently on display, and in a constant state of readiness to enact such a display (at least while logged on to the application). For MSWs, the amount of time spent online using Gaydar can impact the number of enquiries they receive significantly, demonstrating the importance of accessibility to a client’s decision making when purchasing sexual services.

4.7 Information exchange in securing an encounter

Beyond ascertaining the worker’s availability during the initial conversation, clients frequently request more photographs (typically of the worker’s face and penis) if such pictures are not available in the worker’s profile. The communication of photographs via email, text or online message provides another way to circumvent the restrictions of the Sex Work Act (where only images above the shoulders may be used in sex workers’ advertising). Even when he advertises in print, Victorian regulations mean Tom is still required to use the Internet during initial interactions. He is willing to provide as many pictures as a potential client desires, although he will only provide facial pictures to clients that he has seen before in order to refresh their memory.
I explain that I am happy to email and send by phone any photos they need to see, photos of myself, and there are no restrictions in that medium, it’s only [restricted] for the advertising (Tom).

Clearly, the demand for pictures of faces does pose a problem for workers who are concerned about protecting their identity, fearful that the provision of such could lead to public humiliation. This fear is rooted in the stigma attached to sex work by the broader Australian society (despite some normalisation having occurred within the gay community).

Managing it is a full time job…I try to be very smart about everything that I do. I can tell from a [text] message or email or a message on Gaydar if I want to meet that person. They all want to see face pictures, but I never show them and the genuine ones don’t care if they see your face or not. Because when I first did it, I showed a face picture to a few of them. And they were always like ‘great, great, let’s arrange a meeting or whatever’, but it would fizzle through… and I just thought it’s not worth the risk, of having my face in their inbox… I just send naked photos, or semi naked photos. [Now] when they ask me if I have a face picture, I always respond with ‘sorry, I’m extremely discreet, I don’t show pictures, and I’m blonde, blue eyes, square jaw, good looking’. And if they want to know more, they want to know more (Jack).

Similarly, workers are sometimes curious about a potential client’s appearance and request photographs before they commit to engaging in sexual activity with them. Few participants reported requesting photos of their potential clients (although occasionally clients would offer them without solicitation, as described by Seth below). Miles, taking an entrepreneurial approach, considered the impact that requests for photographs may have upon his ability secure clients, fearful that it may ‘potentially offend’ people who may not be at liberty to identify themselves online. Similarly, Joseph contemplated the equity in asking for photographs from clients when he himself routinely withheld a face picture (unless a client was interested in his more expensive service).

Most of the people, well not most, but a lot, that are paying for sex, they’re closeted, or have certain insecurities, or whatever, so requesting a photo [from everyone] would narrow your market… people would just be like ‘oh, I’ll go find someone else – you want a photo, well I don’t have a photo’ (Miles).

I don’t request photos from people because I only provide body shots, so I don’t think it’s fair… although with the [service] that I charge AU$150 for [naked body to body massage] I do include a face shot [in my communication with prospective clients], because if I’m charging that much I feel that they have the right to know what I look like (Joseph).
The (occasionally strategic) lack of interest in a potential client’s appearance demonstrated by participants reveals much about workers’ attitudes towards encounters, prioritising remuneration over any likelihood of physical attraction or sexual gratification. This attitude was best summarised by Seth, positioning himself firmly within the paradigm of ‘sex as work’:

When people send countless thousands of photos [to me], [I want to say] ‘are you confused about my motivation for coming there? Just show me a pile of hundred dollar notes, and we can take it from there... why would I want to see a photo of you?’ [laughs] (Seth).

While clients do contact workers primarily using online methods (e.g. Gaydar messaging), the question of the efficacy of workers’ carefully constructed text must be addressed. Clients refer to the information that a worker has provided in their online profile (forming the basis of his working persona) with varying degrees of specificity, and sometimes ignore it altogether.

Workers including Adam, Tom, Anthony and Neil, each of whom advertised their willingness to cater to (some) fetishes, or ‘kink’, reported the highest rate of clients making specific reference to the textual content of their profiles. This suggests that clients who seek more taboo or esoteric practices pay more attention to workers’ online profiles in order to ensure their specific needs will be met.

I’d say probably about eighty per cent... [of prospective clients refer to] the tradie one, because then they ask what other things I’ve got, what toys do I have, stuff like that (Neil).

I’m always submissive and most clients know that when they make their booking. Most clients generally ask [over the phone] what sort of role I take... they wouldn’t really refer to anything I’ve written in my profile, besides fetishes and we discuss that and prearrange before we meet, so we’re comfortable with that (Tom).

They don’t really refer much to [sexual services], [it’s] more about the porn stuff: ‘oh, I’ve never been with a porn start before’; it’s a fantasy thing for them (Jared).

While Jared does not offer kink in his advertising, the titillating nature of his involvement in pornography appeals to clients’ fantasies of, as Jared put it, ‘doing it with a porn star’. Although less obvious than a penchant for sex toys or even fisting, clients are also likely to pay attention

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62 As described in Chapter Three, some workers may consider the client’s appearance in the screening process – however, this is primarily based on notions of safety as opposed to potential sexual attraction.
to the worker’s profile when a less extreme fetish is involved, such as a fondness for particular types of clothing. In these cases, references to profile information can include requests for workers to wear something they may be wearing in their profile photographs (as described in the following chapter).

Although some references to the worker’s physicality might be made by clients during initial interactions, respondents noted a significant number of instances where clients seem to ignore the text in a worker’s profile altogether. These clients behave as though they have scarcely glanced at the text, let alone comprehended the firm, central and professional demands made by workers therein (e.g. as regards safe sex practices, clients’ levels of cleanliness and limitations of sex acts on offer). Steve, despite investing much time into the design of his profile on Rentboy, reported few client references to his profile at any stage within initial interactions or during encounters. Joseph, given the ambiguity associated with being a body worker, felt it was imperative that he provide as much information as possible to explain the type of services he provides, and to establish firmly the terms and conditions of the encounter in advance of initial contact. However, Joseph was quick to point out that many clients never read his profile, resulting in a barrage of questions (all answered clearly in the text) that cause Joseph frustration:

> It’s quite detailed, and some people don’t put prices or what they actually do. So I tend to put everything on there and people still say ‘oh, what is it you actually do?’ and you want to say ‘oh, just read the profile you idiot’. I don’t think many people actually read it (Joseph).

The highly visual nature of male sexuality is once again invoked here. The fact that a significant number of clients do not to show any interest in the personas of workers reinforces Bailey’s view that the physical aspects of the encounter (i.e. sex acts and the worker’s body) command a disproportionate, if not overwhelming, amount of the client’s attention relative to other aspects that might be enjoyed (e.g. massage, conversation, dinners, companionship). Of course, this thesis represents a study of sex workers, not ‘companion workers’, and it would be ridiculous to argue that sex should be an incidental factor in encounters. Instead, this study highlights that, even in seeking massage services from body workers, clients routinely sexualise the worker in

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63 As described in Chapter Two, ‘body worker’ is an industry term for massage therapists (either trained or untrained) specialising in massage followed by a ‘happy ending’. This usually takes the form of mutual masturbation or a hand job, although some body workers may offer more (oral sex is common, although anal sex is not). The willingness of this group to provide sexual services warrants their inclusion in this study.
question, with little interest in their (potentially constructed) persona or skills as a therapist. Monto echoes this statement:

The idea of shopping for a sex partner with particular physical attributes, such as hair colour, body type or ethnicity – which is precisely what some customers seek – also reflects a conception of sex as a commodity rather than as part of an intimate relationship (Monto 2010: 249).

Monto demonstrates the extent to which sex workers undergo a process of commoditisation, reinforcing Dowsett’s ideas (1996) equating prostitutes with ‘objects’. Such a relationship is exemplified in the admissions of several participants, including Barry, Anthony and Adam, who situate their work and their occupation within an economic paradigm, and refer to themselves with a retail vocabulary, using words such as ‘product’ and ‘a thing being sold’.

Seth reflected upon the tendency of some clients to ignore workers’ detailed, textual profile information although, interestingly, he considers this an unconscious motivation on the part of the client to construct the worker in a manner tailored to their needs. In other words, absorbing less information allows the client more space in which to construct his ideal worker (further explaining the apparent popularity of profiles with minimal information, as described earlier in the chapter).

I mean, some people don’t even look [at the profile]. Some people don’t even read that. I have clients asking me ‘what are the rates?’, because clearly some people are just looking at photos. I think a lot of people [look] – just enough so that they get an idea, but not so much that it destroys whatever preconception they have – and I just try to twig whatever that might be, and kind of bounce it back at them and act like that’s what was there all the time. If you get a forward text message, like ‘are you available now?’ it’s some horny guy who hasn’t read your profile properly, he’s probably seen a photo and knows you’re big, and that’s what he wants. So I don’t spoil that by writing a long convoluted text back, or making it difficult for him, or anything, I just give him the bare minimum (Seth).

Jared was of a similar mind, expressing a preference for not over-negotiating the terms of an encounter via initial interactions, but instead waiting until his arrival at a client’s location where he was better able to ‘figure out who they want me to be’ and ‘invent the story’ (via self-monitoring, addressed in detail in the following chapter).
4.8 Conclusions

This chapter has investigated some of the key processes and techniques adopted by IMSWs in using the Internet to sell sexual services, while also considering client responses to these efforts. The discussion has explored the process of commencing an online sex work career and developing a personal brand, and has examined the marketing strategies employed by IMSWs. These include the offering of ‘niche’ services, seeking and responding to client feedback, pricing of services and also the tendency to assume a sexualised, stereotypical image, which in many instances, is an exploitation of the worker’s own perceived personal and physical strengths.

Irrespective of the style of personal brand employed in workers’ advertising, or the level of detail and effort which some workers will invest in providing information about themselves, the most notable observation is existence of the potential to use such ploys at all. Prior to the advent of the Internet, workers were simply not able to achieve such flexibility, hence the MSW world’s ability to provide such a compelling arena for the analysis of male sexual identity. The flexibility offered by the online marketplace has fostered an unprecedented breadth of choice for ‘consumers’ (i.e. clients). However, many of these efforts to provide such diversity and cater to prospective client’s desires go unnoticed or under-appreciated. Clients typically seek immediate gratification as a result of their circumstances (i.e. needing to act upon windows of opportunity) or sexual ‘needs’. In these instances the worker’s availability, rather than his persona, will invariably take precedence.

Beyond simply perusing workers’ profiles, clients take advantage of the online medium in other ways, increasingly choosing instant online messaging over the (outdated) telephone as a form of communication, whereby sexualised photographs may be requested and exchanged. While the textual, or personal information provided by IMSWs is seldom explored during initial interactions with clients, references to profiles are more likely to occur in the case of a client seeking a worker offering fetish services. To summarise, IMSWs use the Internet to ply their trade in a range of ways, and seek to use the most innovative and remunerative strategies, despite the fact that such efforts may not be appreciated by the client base. Irrespective of outcomes, technology grants contemporary workers and clients the power to implement and respond to such strategies. This flexibility in advertising might be considered an indisputable advantage associated with this medium of sex work, extending the arguments made in Chapter Three. The next chapter in this thesis examines the strategies for success in the IMSW market employed by workers offline, beyond the realm of advertising.
Chapter Five:  
Success in the industry

‘It’s the same with anything; if you’re getting repeat business, you’re obviously doing something right’ (Neil).

5.1 Introduction

To this point, this thesis has detailed the rise of the Internet in the realm of MSW, and the various ways clients and workers use electronic communication to secure commercial sex transactions. The discussion turns now to an analysis of the techniques and strategies employed by workers ‘offline’ (i.e. during client encounters) and the ways these strategies may, or may not, facilitate ‘success’ in the industry. This aspect of the IMSW experience has been overlooked by researchers, and the experiences of IMSWs in client encounters are not well documented. Recent quantitative research has focused primarily on advertising (e.g. Lee-Gonyea, Castle & Gonyea 2009; Logan 2010; Minichiello et al. 2008; Phua & Caras 2008), while qualitative work has failed to explore the way that advertising and the rise of the Internet has impacted upon the experience of sex work (e.g. Uy et al. 2004; Wilcox & Christmann 2008).

This chapter only partially engages with questions examining the ‘gap’ between workers’ constructed online identities and the way the associated personas, agreements and expectations are executed in reality. Investigating this gap is a highly subjective exercise. To assess the ‘authenticity’ of every individual’s profile and sex working persona in relation to their interactions with clients is an unrealistic goal within the time constraints of the interview process. Such an approach would rely on a level of objectivity (from both participants and the researcher) impossible to guarantee. Further, the approach would assume that participants’ responses were 100 per cent accurate and honest, which cannot be taken for granted in qualitative research (e.g. Maynes, Pierce & Laslett 2008). In the interest of providing a more demonstrable argument, this chapter documents the mechanisms IMSWs employ in order to secure ‘success’, as well as the nature of that success. It is important to recognise that while the Internet does play a role in shaping the context of an encounter, what takes place between two individuals in private may not always be influenced by technological advances (i.e. what seems ‘promised’ in the virtual context that IMSW is founded upon).
While success can be understood in a context of marketing and personal branding (and perceived efficacy in attracting clients, as discussed in the preceding chapter), the analysis in this chapter focuses upon the actions taken by workers during encounters and in their general communication with clients with the express purpose of accumulating ‘regulars’. In other words, the notion of success discussed herein (as articulated in Neil’s opening quote and echoed by other participants) corresponds to a worker’s ability to maintain a regular (and ideally wealthy) client base. Such regulars provide lucrative returns, which conforms to the definition of success favoured in any capitalist society. Phua and Caras (2008) highlighted the demand for such an analysis with their recommendation that future studies examine what constitutes ‘success’ in the MSW market (in addition to an assessment of the ‘authenticity’ of profile information).

It is worth considering the varying ways that success can be framed – for example in regard to the quality and quantity of interpersonal and romantic relationships, one’s sexual enjoyment, and sense of professional fulfillment – even if measuring these dimensions might prove more difficult.

An inventory of strategies for success in the IMSW ‘offline’ market will be outlined in this chapter. Such strategies include the active construction of sex work as a business, the use of clothing and props, refraining from ‘clockwatching’, maintaining a focus on relationship building, and the setting of personal boundaries. Using Snyder’s (1974) theory of self-monitoring, the chapter argues that those who are able to adapt to client tastes and expectations as high self-monitors are more likely to maintain a long-term client base. Finally, Jared’s circumstances are discussed as a case study, delineating a dubious example of long-term success as a male sex worker in the online industry.

5.2 The construction of sex work as an informal business

The inspiration for this chapter is drawn largely from the work of Phua and Caras (2008) who investigated the online profiles of Brazilian and Caucasian IMSWs. Although the authors did not carry out a qualitative analysis of client encounters in the manner attempted here, their study highlights a research avenue they consider worthy of consideration given the context of Internet-based male sex work:

The success of rent boys depends only partially on their advertisements. The determining measurement of success is the ability to seal the transaction to the satisfaction of all parties. Further studies should examine success and include research with rent boys and their clients through in-depth interviews and or surveys. Topics might
include whether the information provided is authentic; interpretations of both rent boys and clients should be considered (Phua & Caras 2008: 252).

Before examining the strategies used by workers in encounters, it is important to shed some light upon the feelings and attitudes of IMSWs towards their work. Such attitudes will consciously or unconsciously influence a worker’s actions. As the previous chapter showed, an aversion to involvement in sex work often minimises the effort a worker expends soliciting and interacting with a client base (as was the case with Lachlan, Brian, and Jack). While this chapter does take the experiences of such individuals into account, the focus is upon those participants who display at least a small amount of enthusiasm for their work, and the approaches they employ to maximise their success in the industry.

Browne and Minichiello (1995; 1996b) were (according to the authors) the first researchers to examine MSW in a context of ‘work’. This framework has received scant attention since, despite the pervasiveness of the broader (and largely feminised) sex work vs. prostitution debate.

Using a business orientation has a twofold benefit. First, it enables male sex workers to understand sex work within a broader social context of masculine behavior… being able to capitalise on personal resources in order to make money is an acceptable and legitimate way in which to prove one’s masculinity and worth to society…[male sex workers] are able to use their bodies as a resource. They capitalise on male sexuality as part of their creative ingenuity within the work ethic of society, and are able to see this as acceptable male behaviour. They interact with their clients as one businessman to another: ‘I have something to sell, and you have a need for that service’ (1995: 90).

Akin to Browne and Minichiello’s (1995) respondents who treat sex work as legitimate employment, many participants of this study situated themselves within the ‘sex as work’ paradigm. Anthony sees his willingness to prioritise attending jobs (i.e. a high level of availability) as a cornerstone of his success as a sex worker. In forgoing social events in favour of work, Anthony feels as though he regularly demonstrates commitment to his occupation. Seth reported an almost ‘obsessive’ tendency to manage his profile and check messages left by potential clients.

It’s like every other business, really. I treat it like a business. So I work fairly hard at trying to do what I want to do, and I sacrifice a lot of things in my private life to work, if there’s something I want to achieve, or some debt that I want to pay off, or if I wanted a new bike… I treat it like a business except for all the taxation, licensing stuff64 (Anthony).

64 This lax attitude was shared by many participants towards such matters as taxation (despite viewing sex work as a ‘business’). Issues surrounding registration are discussed in the following chapter.
It’s funny, basically with every other job I’ve ever had; I’ve always been really lazy. But with this, I’m so diligent, pretty much every morning the first thing I do is check my messages on Gaydar... it feels like an obsession sometimes (Seth).

Several participants spoke of the taxing nature of sex work. As Miles describes below, client contact and encounters can be sporadic and even non-existent for short periods. Despite the comparatively brief ‘jobs’ or ‘shifts’ undertaken by workers, the work itself has the potential to be physically and emotionally draining (as described in the following chapter). The need for some sex workers to convey that their occupation is ‘regular work’ was captured by Miles:

There’ll be nothing in one week and then there’ll be five jobs in one day. Which is fun, but difficult… at the end of it, you feel like you’ve done a full eight hour job. You know – it’s like a job that normal people do (Miles).

Workers reported several strategies for managing a client base, each sufficiently effective to confirm that participants approach their work ‘like a business’. Although few participants admitted to compiling detailed physical client lists, some spoke of devising mental ‘databases’, of clients profiles in order to maintain their favoured business relationships. Bailey, Jordan, and Jared were the only workers to report maintaining a physical inventory – likely due to the large number of regular clients they service. While Bailey considers himself to be in possession of a strong memory, he also relies on his written records as a method of avoiding ‘undesirables’.

I’ll do them once, and then [if I don’t like them] I’ll make a profile of them, and I’ll say, ‘they do this, this and this’, and I won’t contact them, and if they contact me, I’ll [pretend to] be busy or something like that (Bailey).

In contrast, Miles saves descriptions of his client base in his ‘work phone’ and ascribes certain characteristics (e.g. ‘Michael with glasses’) to prompt his associative memory.

I save people in my phone in terms of… [their key characteristics], so I can get a sense of – something that gets me going ‘ah, that’s who it is’, for when they call me or whatever… I know some people keep notes on clients… but I don’t tend to do that, I can just kind of [remember]. Or if I’m really stuck, I’ll look at their [online] profile [to jog my memory] (Miles).

However informal, the construction of sex work as a business allows workers to establish a sense of control over their activities. Further, workers who employ such strategies are more easily able to monitor their success and efficacy in attracting and retaining clients. The Internet
has little bearing upon this aspect of MSW, with sex workers of all genders across all settings varying in their approach and attitude towards their work.

5.3 Using clothing and props

An additional strategy for success discussed by participants was their use of clothing and props during encounters as a means of appealing to client fantasies. This practice provides some workers with an opportunity to develop their online persona further (or enhance their physicality). This brings the realm of online fantasy into the practical sexual experience - a tangible example of the Internet’s influence upon encounters. The most common ‘look’ adopted by participants was that of the ‘tradie’, an attractive look due to its simplicity, low cost, and perceived popularity among clients. The ‘tradie look’ serves as a physical manifestation of the (stereotypical) ‘hyper masculine’ identity constructed online, as described in the previous chapter. Neil provides an example. On the day of his interview, Neil presented in full tradie attire. When asked if he was working as a tradesman, Neil revealed that he had never worked in a trade, and that prior to sex working he had been employed in white collar professions. Moreover, Neil had no sex work booked for the afternoon, but was dressed in such a way so that he could ‘get in character’ in the event of being contacted by a client. Neil adopted the same persona in his online personal brand, considering the image it portrays to be the most popular among clients (and therefore the most lucrative) in the IMSW market. Dressing in such a manner helps both Neil and his clients enact their fantasies about ‘tradie’ men.

A few people have asked [what kind of tradesman I am], and I’ve just said I’ve done landscaping, I mean my hands are too soft these days, and I’m sure some people know that.

[Ok, so what sort of things will you do to try and convey that persona?]

Oh, role play, that’s a big one, people want their oven looked at, or their VCR looked at, and I’m supposedly testing it and a porno pops up, and quite a few people have gone with that scenario, and I haven’t suggested it, they have, and it’s like ‘ok’. So you know, role play can be a big thing (Neil).

While Anthony’s natural style resembles that of a real tradie, he exaggerates the style, purposefully cultivating the image in his clothing.

[I make an effort with] clothes, most of my clothes are fairly ratty work wear anyway.

[So you go for a tradie look? Is that what you normally wear?]
Yep. There was one guy that I saw recently, and I was wearing a wife beater\textsuperscript{65} and dirty boots, and then he saw my jeans and said, ‘they’re Industrie\textsuperscript{66} jeans, you’re not fucking fooling me’. And I went, ‘damn it’ [laughs] (Anthony).

Although Seth takes a more casual and subtle approach, he acknowledged wearing gym shorts and running shoes to suggest athleticism when projecting his persona of ‘training Olympian’ for clients (portrayed online and during initial interactions).

Miles spoke of being requested, on occasion, to wear the same type of underwear that he wears in his profile photos - demonstrating again the sexualised nature of client demands, as well as the Internet’s potential to shape encounters.

Not that it’s necessarily been explicit, but there has been a few times where people [say] ‘can you wear that jock strap that you have in your picture’, or ‘can you answer the door wearing that, it’ll be really hot’. Or things like that – where they’ve asked me to perform in a certain way. Yeah, like do this, do that [in reference to my profile] (Miles).

The use of props was much less common than costumes among members of the sample, with the exception of Anthony and Tom. Anthony considers his image so important to his work that it influences major life purchases, such as his choice of vehicle. While he enjoys motorbikes, Anthony admitted that a motivation to purchase his own bike was its potential to fulfill client fantasies.

There are some people who want to get fucked on the bike. When I do get a car I’m pretty sure I’ll get a ute [utility vehicle], because quite a few people seem to like the idea of getting fucked in the back of a ute by a tradie (Anthony).

While Tom does not go to such elaborate lengths to secure props for his clients, he recognises the importance of being able to supply the props necessary to provide the sexual services expected by clients as a result of his advertising on fetish websites.

\textit{Recon [www.recon.com]} is a site that specializes in kink and fetish... [if I get] clients I get from that [source] I’ll say ‘what kind of gear have you got [and] what kind of gear would you like me to provide’, and generally if they say [they saw my advertisement] on \textit{Rentboy}, I’ll think [they are] ‘vanilla\textsuperscript{67}, clean’...I have quite a big selection of toys, dildos,

\textsuperscript{65} A slang term for a type of singlet often associated with tradesmen.

\textsuperscript{66} Industrie is an urban designer label that would not be associated with tradesmen’s attire on a work/building site.

\textsuperscript{67} Refers to ‘straight’ sex that disregards any esoteric practices.
all the usual stuff, I’m into BDSM, and light SM, as a bottom, so I’ve got restraints and cuffs and ropes and all of that sort of stuff, so... you need to be able to cater to different client groups across different sites (Tom).

The steps taken by this group of participants demonstrate that a small amount of effort with clothing and props can go a long way in assisting clients to enact their fantasies, and reinforces participants’ views of the importance of a client-centered approach (i.e. considering acquiescence to client demands and needs as a priority). Additionally, the Internet provides such workers with the means to gauge the success of their chosen look, and to make clients aware in advance of the clothing and props at their disposal. It is no coincidence that these participants belong to the same group demonstrating proclivities towards high self-monitoring in encounters with clients, as discussed later in this chapter.

5.4 Refraining from ‘clockwatching’

Although it may seem a minor factor, participants consider the ability to appear unconcerned with the amount of time spent with clients in encounters important to success as an IMSW. Monitoring the length of time spent with a client is one of the key ways in which sex workers may (or may not) exhibit autonomy in their working lives. As noted by Perkins (1994), street-based sex workers are bound by the time demands of the sex act. These can work either for or against the worker depending on the time to ejaculation. Many street workers have compared the earning potential of their medium favourably against brothels. An hour spent with one paying client in a brothel, they reason, may be spent servicing numerous paying clients on the street (Rowe 2011a). In many brothels, both the receptionist and the worker will pay close attention to the clock, often to the exact minute. In contrast, a private worker may exercise his own discretion. It should be noted that the opportunity to benefit from this ‘no clockwatching’ strategy is open to all private sex workers, and is not the sole domain of the IMSW.

While the reality of sex work dictates that the worker is being remunerated for the provision of his time and sexual services, and must therefore take note of when the negotiated time period has ended, many workers abstain from ‘watching the clock’ in an obvious manner. Doing so would reiterate the base commercial nature of the intimate encounter just shared. Workers understand that this risks dispelling the delicate illusion of a ‘boyfriend experience’, thus jeopardising their ability to secure further encounters with the client. Participants detailed

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68 Bondage, Discipline, and Sado-Masochism.
several methods of ensuring that both parties’ obligations to the agreed time span are fulfilled, while ensuring the client does not feel ‘cheated’. Miles spoke of avoiding strict time limits, but instead emphasising approximate times.

I don’t set times, because otherwise they feel cheated when you leave five minutes early, or you end up watching the clock… I always say [I’ll spend] around an hour (Miles).

Bailey, drawing upon his years of experience, can rely on his ‘internal clock’ and intuitive knowledge of how long the agreed expectations of the encounter will take to meet. His description is almost ritualistic, and illustrative of his perception of clients as capital.

I’m very smart about how I watch the time. I do wear a watch; I never look [directly] at my watch though. I have ways of looking at my watch and knowing what stage we are at. But because I’ve been doing it for so long, I know how long I can generally talk for, and have a drink, and how long it’s going to take to get off, and work a shower time into that. And generally I don’t tell clients that the time is up, I play it by ear, if we’re going to go five minutes over that’s fine. But I normally walk out of the door with time to spare. I generally work on a theory of get ‘em in, get ‘em off and get ‘em out (Bailey).

As a reluctant sex worker, Jack is a self-admitted clock-watcher. He openly acknowledges that this approach may prevent him from attracting regular clients. This does not concern Jack, for he knows that seeing clients regularly would lead to unwanted self-identification as a sex worker.

[When clients come to my place], I make sure I have every clock going in the house. At that point in time, I’m thinking ‘I never want to see this person again in my life’... to be honest, I’m really not looking for repeat business (Jack, his emphasis).

Other participants, such as Steve, are content to spend more than the agreed time period, particularly for the first encounter with a new client. This approach is designed to guarantee that clients ‘will come back for a second time’. Such practices reflect Steve’s tranquil character, demonstrated in our interview with his relaxed and unhurried demeanour. Individuals (including Steve) who depend on sex work as a sole source of income often have more flexible schedules compared with those working in another full or part-time occupation. Willingness to spend extra time as part of their business acumen is a luxury other workers may not be able to afford. To summarise, while some participants who actively (albeit subtly) ‘clock-watch’ reported the ability to retain regular clients, flexibility with the conclusion of a booking was perceived to be a strategy likely to encourage repeat business, particularly if relationship building strategies could be implemented. Several workers note their flexible booking times in their online advertising.
This suggests that clients may expect this courtesy from IMSWs, and provides another example of the Internet’s ability to influence the terms of an encounter.

5.5 Establishing contact after the first encounter and relationship building

Participants reported differing ideas regarding the appropriateness of making unsolicited contact with established clients (i.e. those they had seen at least once). As noted in the previous chapter, Joseph (among others) considers it important to be online regularly to convey a sense of availability. Other workers choose a more proactive approach to promoting their availability by contacting (either via SMS, email or online messaging) certain members of their client base directly to gauge their interest in arranging an encounter. Such contacts seldom take place over the telephone. This aversion to phone calls further demonstrates the contemporary male sex industry’s preference for more discreet (and digitalised) modes of contact, and illustrates the Internet’s growing role as a medium of communication. Miles often contacts preferred clients (i.e. those to whom he has taken a liking) shortly after a first encounter with a brief, yet personal message. In adopting this ‘active’ solicitation approach, Miles aims to establish an ongoing (and hopefully well remunerated) relationship with the client.

I’ll often follow up a session with a text message, or a message online, you know like ‘that was really hot, I hope to see you again’, and with some kind of personal element – [one should] always play the personal (Miles).

Conversely, Seth feels that making unsolicited contact with clients would come across as ‘desperate’, and worries that his clients may perceive him as a ‘gold digger’ (a term disliked by Jared, as highlighted in Chapter Three). Seth prefers to use a ‘passive’ approach in maintaining client contact.

I don’t like to keep a lot of contact with my clients when I’m not with them... a lot of clients have said to me, ‘oh, that escort was really nice, but he was overbearing, he used to text me every week and try and get money from me’. I don’t do that, I let them approach me, and then I’ll talk to them, because I don’t like to seem desperate (Seth).

Proactive contact is the initial stage of a process several participants termed ‘relationship building’. In her book *The Purchase of Intimacy* (2010), Viviana Zelizer discusses the ways individuals use economic activity to establish and sustain intimate bonds with others. The client/sex worker relationship is situated firmly within this discussion. According to Zelizer, sex work is intrinsically incapable of featuring in truly intimate ties as ‘the ever-present price for sex
eliminates any possibility of intimacy’ (2010: 126). The contentiousness of experiencing real intimacy, and the need for sex workers to convince their clients of the legitimacy of intimate behaviour, are factors that inform the relationship building process from the beginning. While Zelizer’s work is concerned with the general principles and questions that arise in any economically-based intimate bond, her views are particularly applicable to a client’s initial appraisal of the client/worker relationship.

Intimate relations matter. Because of their importance, intimate relations become vulnerable to misunderstandings, moral outrage, mismatches, falsification, and betrayal. Intimacy creates all sorts of dilemmas: is this person a gold digger or an intimate friend? Is this a caring relation or exploitation? … determining what kind of economic activity matches which kind of intimacy matters enormously to the participants… people invest a great deal of energy in marking the right economic transactions for the relationship and distinguishing them sharply from the wrong economic transactions (2010: 306-307).

The sentiments of both Miles (i.e. an active approach) and Seth (i.e. a passive approach) are examples of workers demarcating the ‘right’ transactions from the ‘wrong’. Other participants, such as Bailey and Jared, require a period of time to pass, during which the client must regularly (and without solicitation) arrange to see the worker, before they can feel comfortable making unsolicited contact under the guise of ‘friendship’. The true intent behind the contact, however, is not only to encourage the client to think of them, but also to foster the client’s development of an emotional bond. For Jared and Bailey, this tactic was instrumental to their genuine success in the industry (i.e. earning many thousands of dollars each week). Both workers claimed to service sufficient regulars to render new clients unnecessary. However, both workers continued to advertise, indicating their insecurity in the fidelity of their existing regulars in the long term.

The reason why I think I’ve done pretty well doing it and why I have so many long-term clients is [because] I don’t do it just for the one hour experience and then it’s done with. I try to build the relationship with them first so they’ll want to see me again and they’ll want a bit more each time, and it’s worked quite well. But at the same time I’ll send them a text [saying] ‘hey, how’s your day going’. It sounds ridiculous, but they appreciate it more, they think it’s not just a fee for sex; they’re getting a friend out of it too. Well, they think they’re getting a friend out of it (Jared, my emphasis).

I have regulars that I text message all the time, [saying] ‘how’s your week going?’ because I know that they’re going to hire me in that week and I haven’t received a booking from them yet, so I’m trying to work out my schedule for the week. I won’t imply anything about catching up with them; it’ll just be a quick message… I’ll never be like ‘oh, do you want to fuck’, or [anything like that]. Some escorts will do that and it can be
The capacity to build relationships in person (i.e. during encounters with clients) was widely recognised by participants as crucial to professional success, and is essentially removed from the arena of online activity. This strategy of relationship building is loosely defined. Each client and worker relationship is unique, and an approach must be tailored to fit that specific context. In other words, there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach, and the capacity to build relationships stems from the worker’s charisma (although such charisma may not always be genuine). Workers’ skills in this regard vary significantly, and the ability to charm a broad range of clients may be unattainable for some. As has been detailed above, the opportunity to build relationships with new clients commences with the first (often electronic) contact. However, the encounter itself serves as a more effective medium.

Demonstrating (or feigning) interest in the client’s personal life is another strategy for success employed by IMSWs. Participants revealed that asking questions is the best mechanism for discovering more about a client’s personal life. While this observation may not appear noteworthy, the practice frequently garners client approval in a market featuring many workers disinterested in the personal lives of their clients.

I’ve heard from some clients, and I hear this a lot…[from those] that have been to [a particular worker and they] have said that he was really rude, and wanted it over and done with, as if the client was a piece of shit and they should pay him just for being in the same room. And I’ve read his profile and I really do get that vibe from the profile, and I would suggest that actually is the case… I don’t know him so I can’t really judge, but either that’s his gimmick, ‘I’m a rude cunt’, or he just has bad business acumen, or he just is [an arsehole] (Seth).

By asking questions, workers such as Anthony and Tyrone feel as though they are fulfilling their obligation to provide an encounter centered upon the client’s needs, with a more balanced information exchange achieved during subsequent encounters.

[It’s important to] ask them questions, because it’s not about you. Maybe after the third time, it can become about you as well, and they ask questions about you, but generally you’re there for them. [I ask questions] partly to find out what they want so I can do it,
and it also makes them feel more comfortable, and they feel important if you’re talking to them and listening to them, and making eye contact, instead of just being some guy who turns up, fucks them and leaves. They want to feel special – so just give them what they want, that’s what you’re there for, and you’re getting paid really well for it (Anthony).

The best thing [about sex work is] having regular clients and knowing their problems [over time]… because I think that’s what they want [from me]. Sometimes I text them [and say] ‘hi, how are you going’, [I often find] it’s really easy to talk to them (Tyrone).

Tom also considers asking questions an important strategy for retaining clients. While he views the questions as a means of ensuring his clients feel valued and return, he also uses them to deflect interest in his own personal life and withhold information about himself. Although Tom claims to be genuinely fond of some of his clients, he has a day-time career in the public eye and is determined to keep his after-hours activities a closely guarded secret. When clients notice this deflection and attempt to acquire personal information about Tom (such as his day job, family status, or birth name), he will politely refuse to provide it, emphasising its relative triviality to the nature of the encounter and client/worker relationship.

I use techniques to avoid those types of questions... if I feel that the client in the initial meeting is starting to probe too much, I’ll deflect all of that, by asking questions back, or if it’s really awkward because he’s put me on the spot, I’ll just ask if I can use the toilet, then come back into the room, and slam him with a question straight up. Or [ask for] a glass of water, a cup of tea – just try and repeat myself, [asking] ‘how did you find my ad, why did you choose me’, etc, and then you might wind that conversation up pretty quickly. At times, I’ve been challenged on it, but it’s not been an uncomfortable thing for me, it’s been like, ‘well, it’s not really about me, it’s about you, this is our time, and does it really matter what I do for a living, or when I start work tomorrow morning? We’re here for an hour, so let’s make it a really good hour’ (Tom).

Not all interviewees reported Tom’s level of hesitation to provide personal information when building relationships with clients. Those who choose neither to use a pseudonym in their working lives nor to manufacture a sex working identity (Steve, Kent, Anthony) are much more open to clients’ questions, responding truthfully as though they have ‘nothing to hide’, and are not interested in telling lies. Each of these men considers their client base to appreciate their honesty and ‘authenticity’, viewing this point of difference as a central component of their success as a sex worker (even if Anthony is prone to exaggerating his ‘tradie’ style).

Miles considers it important to ‘play the personal’ when dealing with clients. This approach allows the client to feel ‘special’ and (however briefly) convince themselves that the worker is
interested in them exclusively. The practice is a physical manifestation of the ‘boy next door’
approach (i.e. a ‘boyfriend experience’), as discussed in the previous chapter. Joseph, a body
worker, develops casual ‘friendships’ with many clients, and attributes much of his success in
retaining long-term clients to his recollection of specific events in their lives. Bailey emphasised
the importance of listening.

I think the reason why a lot of my clients come back is [because] I build good rapport
with them. Depending on the client, I don’t press them for information but if they offer it I
tend to remember it. So a lot of the time when I see a client it’s like catching up with a
friend - they’ll say, ‘I went overseas’, or such and such happened, and I’m naturally
inquisitive, and attentive to information… and to a certain extent I share information with
clients, general information about studies, or seeing a movie, nothing personal. And I
think that sort of helps; there is a level of intimacy, even if it is for that hour. So it’s sort of
like a friendship, a relationship, in a way (Joseph).

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I know how to work the situation to revolve around the client, because I found if I do that,
then the client talks a lot more and you get more in-depth conversation into their life and
they feel that you’re really listening to them, because a lot of people just want to be
listened to in this world, and that’s generally why they hire you (Bailey).

Some workers, including Miles and Joseph, demonstrated a genuine interest in their clients and
described varying levels of sincere emotional attachment. Each displayed correspondingly warm
and friendly demeanour throughout interviews, indicating levels of innate connectivity. Such
authenticity cannot be guaranteed across the IMSW market - or across any service industry
(e.g. Hochschild 1983), and no useful metric exists for assessing authenticity in this context.
West and de Villiers (1992) discuss the way that feigned affection can be conveyed in the
(male) sex work trade.

Many sex workers distance themselves emotionally from their customers, using a forced
insincerity to mask their boredom, hostility or disgust. These reactions do not necessarily
stem from dislike of homosexual contact as such, but from the obligation to meet the
demands of an older or unattractive partner chosen for reasons of commercial rather
than sexual interest (1992: 93).

Jack’s experience echoes the above assertion. Having never enjoyed himself with a client, and
engaging in sex work only to finance his large personal debt, Jack is emotionally distanced from
his clients on a regular basis. Jack’s attitude and feelings of revulsion towards his clients (and
himself) are, correspondingly, not conducive to long-term success in the industry. The
experiences of this study’s participants illustrate that, irrespective of the sincerity of the worker’s
attraction to the client, it is central to the success of most workers that they at least appear genuine.

The strategies discussed above may appear informal (i.e. relying on casual record keeping, solicitation, ‘friendly’ gestures and the use of clothing and props) considering workers are running income-generating private enterprises. This disorganisation reflects the nature of the Internet-based male sex trade. Sophisticated advertising, record keeping, and/or consistent client contact are incongruent with the desires of some IMSWs (and their clients) who wish to keep their activities discreet and part-time. Aside from creating expectations (regarding a worker’s appearance/sexual persona and time spent in encounters) and providing an attractive mode of contact and communication, the Internet has little influence over this component of interaction. Having outlined the strategies for success that form a part of each worker’s personalised business approach, this study will address the manner in which workers respond (or fail to respond) to the perceived needs of clients in encounters.

5.6 Self-monitoring in IMSW

In Goffman’s seminal text on social interaction, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, he highlights the importance of being consistent with information when establishing credibility in social situations.

As the interaction among the participants progresses, additions and modifications in this initial informational state will of course occur, but it is essential that these later developments be related without contradiction to, and even built up from, the initial positions taken by the several participants (1959: 22).

Social psychologist Mark Snyder extends Goffman’s (1959) study of social interaction and ‘face work’. Snyder assisted in developing the concept of self-monitoring, which refers to the use of social cues by individuals to modify their presentation of self in social settings. Snyder defines those who choose to ignore or do not respond to such cues as ‘low self-monitors’ (LSMs).

Persons who have not learned a concern for appropriateness of their self-presentation would not have such well developed self-monitoring skills and would not be so vigilant to social comparison information about appropriate patterns of expression and experience. That is not to say they are not emotionally expressive or even that they are less so than those who monitor their presentation. Rather, their self-presentation and expressive behavior seem, in a functional sense, to be controlled from within by their affective states
(they express it as they feel it) rather than monitored, controlled and molded to fit the situation (1974: 52).

In other words, such individuals are less likely to ‘put on an act’ in social settings or stray from their genuine emotional state, quite unlike the ‘high self-monitors’ (HSMs) described by Snyder below:

Self-monitored expressive behavior should vary more from situation to situation than non-monitored expressive behavior... The [high] self monitoring individual is one who, out of a concern for social appropriateness, is particularly sensitive to the expression and self-presentation of others in social situations and uses these cues as guidelines for monitoring his own self-presentation (ibid: 52).

As a form of acting, self-monitoring is akin to Hochschild’s (1983) well-known theory of emotion work, yet it differs in its more superficial and ephemeral nature. For example, Snyder’s (high) self-monitors harness verbal cues to provide (or invent) an anecdote relevant to the situation, while Hochschild’s emotion worker seeks to display feelings (e.g. admiration, enjoyment) with the intent of instilling a particular feeling within a client. The business of making (sometimes unattractive or unlikeable) strangers feel satisfied both sexually and conversationally appears best suited to high self-monitors - particularly given the improbability of any genuine willingness to acquiesce to the fantasies and expectations of such clients.

**High self-monitoring**

Of the 23 IMSWs interviewed for this project, 16 could be described as HSMs while seven could be described as LSMs. Although no scales were used to assign these labels (such as the scales used by Snyder), the qualitative data show the inclination (or lack thereof) of workers to act upon cues given by clients. Throughout their interviews, workers were asked to describe how they came to understand their clients’ expectations. Participants used phrases such as ‘behave in a certain way’, ‘become a character’ and ‘invent the story’ in their answers, and suggested that this modification of behavior was integral to securing a long-term clients.

Mathues spoke of the necessity of high self-monitoring in sex work, considering it crucial to his success, and Jared highlighted some of the cues he responds to in encounters with clients.

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69 See the Appendix for a copy of the interview schedule.
Through sex work I grew in experience, I grew in knowledge and being understanding, being tactile, and it was so important to learn how to perceive well what people want from me... people project what they want on to me, and I am the link that allows them to connect with that, what they want in themselves. So [whatever they’re looking for], an emotional touch with a soul about it, they are relying on me to be giving them the link (Matheus).

When you walk into someone’s house you can tell by their personality who they are and what they want you to be. You know, [when they ask] ‘are you submissive?’ [I'll say] ‘yeah, I’m a bottom’, or ‘I want you to dominate me’, you develop that personality to go with it, so there’s many different characters that go with Jared, depending on the client, and it gets really exhausting. Sometimes you have to write it down\(^{70}\), you know, who the person was, what they wanted, who they wanted me to be and what story I told them at the time. Because I don’t tell people that I study science, I tell them something else. And I need to remember what I told them at the time. Because some people might want me to be more dominant – [and I’ll say] ‘yeah, I’m an air pilot’, or learning how to fly a plane, because that turns them on, it’s a sexy job for them. Other people want something different. So [it can be] very exhausting... I can tell [how to behave], because I’m not going to say to someone ‘oh I’m a pilot’ if I look around and see photos of planes everywhere, because they’ll ask me questions and I’ll be caught out. So you sort of adapt and look in the environment and if they said they were a doctor, I wouldn’t say ‘oh, I study medicine’ – you don’t say that, because then they’ll catch you out. And you’ve got to keep an eye on it, because they don’t want the fake thing. So I try to be myself, as much as possible, so I talk to them just like I talk to anyone else really, but I make it more believable (Jared).

As he discusses the extent to which he will adopt alternate personas, while claiming to ‘be himself’, there is a sharp contradiction visible in Jared’s sense of a consistent self. Like Jared, Seth has a reliable, loyal and wealthy client base. Seth also attributes his success in sex work to his ability to tailor an approach to each client. He invents details regarding his occupation, studies and hobbies not only with the intention of impressing his clients, but also for his own amusement.

A proclivity to invent stories, partially for the worker’s own amusement, was a common experience among research participants. Lachlan, a performance art student, admitted telling several clients that he was auditioning to be a cast member for the hit musical comedy show *Glee*, filmed in the US.

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\(^{70}\) An example of physical record keeping as detailed earlier in this chapter.
Well, it sounds really ridiculous, but [I told one client recently] that I’m trying to get into television and that’s why I keep a low profile, and that I was going to be on Glee... and that’s why I was going to Los Angeles...because he was obsessed with celebrities, and I could tell that he had, you know, New Idea, Women’s weekly, and OK\textsuperscript{71} magazine in his house and... I thought I’d play that, just for [fun] (Lachlan).

Such stories often contain fragments of truth, with the worker embellishing details around a particular set of skills, interests, attributes, or hobbies (at times delineated in an online profile as discussed in the previous chapter). On occasion, cues from clients take more explicit forms. Karl and Brian spoke of being prompted by clients to tell stories of an overtly sexual nature, usually during sexual activity (i.e. being encouraged to provide ‘dirty talk’). Even as HSMS, both workers found this a difficult request to meet, suggesting that the capacity to lie convincingly and easily does not always coincide with a high self-monitoring personality.

\textit{[Do you ever tell outright lies to clients?]}

Yeah, but they’re lies that seem to make my own life more interesting, or more sexy... some of them, that’s what they want to hear, there are clients that just want to sit around and have sexy talk for an hour. Which is agony, I find it really, really difficult, because I’m a bad liar (Karl).

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Some people can be really dirty, and they’re like ‘tell me about when you were young and you used to fuck your school mates’, shit like that, and I have to make up some story... and I couldn’t look them in the face while I was doing it, and I’d be rolling my eyes and trying to think [about what to say]... it’s sort of annoying (Brian).

The stress of remembering which stories have been relayed, and to whom, can complicate sex workers’ professional and personal lives. This is true irrespective of whether this is based on attempts to please clients in catering to their fantasies, or to keep things more exciting (as was the case with Seth), or, as in Tom’s case, a need to protect one’s privacy.

I think besides those who must have very preconceived and incorrect ideas about what they were getting, nearly everyone seems pretty happy – and I think that’s because I twist that to the individual because I can see what they want. I often tell people I’m studying to be a lawyer, and working as an article clerk, sometimes I tell them I’m a PhD student, and then again I’ll tell them I’m an athlete training for the Olympics – that sort of used to be true, in a way... [At the end of the booking] I’ll usually say, ‘I have to go, sorry, I’ve got a brief to do, got this case coming up’ that kind of crap... but then sometimes it’s

\textsuperscript{71} These are magazines marketed to women and feature the latest celebrity gossip.
hard to remember because you don’t know if [you’ve told them that] you’re the PhD student, [or the] trainaholic who’s training all the time or the article clerk! (Seth).

It’s always challenging, especially when you’ve got regulars, because you need to remember what you’ve told them! I’m really private with my life, as much as possible… sometimes you can accidentally slip in too much detail. Generally, I try to stick with high level [clients], and my regulars, as they’ve got to know me over the years very well, they know about family and friends, and all that sort of stuff (Tom).

Tom’s quote shows that for some workers, their self-presentation may become more authentic as their relationship with a client evolves. In other words, the need to relay false information is diminished as trust builds between individuals, although responses to cues regarding sexual activity likely remain.

**Low self-monitoring**

Participants displaying the behaviours of LSMs consider low self-monitoring a way of honouring their ‘true’ selves, while avoiding the complications that can arise from higher levels of self-monitoring. These men find it easier and more rewarding to be ‘honest’ (to a degree) with clients and themselves about their identities instead of adapting the situation to meet the needs of the client. Steve and Kent are two workers who use their birth names in their professional lives (alongside Anthony), and are low self-monitors. Several other participants who do use pseudonyms are also willing to provide truthful information about their personal lives, albeit to a limited extent.

Steve, Kent and Anthony justified their refusals to use a pseudonym in subtly different ways. Steve was adamant about using his birth name, linking his name with notions of professional integrity, which he reasoned would reflect upon his reputation and his success in the industry. However, Steve’s perspective is attributable to his lack of a public professional identity (i.e. in terms of mainstream employment where his involvement in sex work could discredit him).

You’ve got to be willing to put your name out there. I use my real name; I don’t have an alias name or anything like that. I don’t believe in it. Some guys have got three or four different names, you know… just be honest from the start… don’t put yourself in the dark (Steve).
Anthony uses his birth name because he considers himself to be a ‘bad liar’. On balance, however, Anthony’s willingness to adapt to client expectations and exaggerate his masculinity make him a HSM. Kent does not consider his involvement in sex work a source of shame, and feels that adopting a pseudonym would betray his sense of security (and self-worth) in relation to his work.

On my travels I’ve met a couple [of sex workers going by their birth names], but yeah, not so much. But I think [a pseudonym] is just pointless to me, I don’t see what having a fake name is gonna achieve. I get it, but to me it’s – ‘I’m Kent, this is who I am, take it or leave it’ (Kent).

In some respects, forgoing a pseudonym emancipates workers from the need to navigate an exaggerated (or entirely invented) working persona alongside their ‘real’ selves. The practice also signifies a possible connection to the normalisation of sex work in gay social life (as discussed in Chapter Three). Sanders (2005: 329) notes that one of several motivations for the adoption of a pseudonym among [female] sex workers is to minimise the risk of ‘whore stigma’. In the world of male sex workers, it seems many inhabitants are nonchalant about their work and correspondingly less compelled to draw sharp distinctions between their working and personal lives.

Some workers relay factual information about their personal lives, including details of their education, day job, birthplace or family life, for a variety of reasons. Predominantly, as noted above, respondents consider the truth easier to manage.

I tell [a] true story, where I come from. Real name? No. I think it’s just my real name and where I live [that I don’t provide], but other than that I tell the truth, because sometimes if I get called and tell the wrong story, and they’re asking me again and again, it’s easier [to tell the truth], I don’t wanna get lost [in stories] (Tyrone).

[In terms of conversation, how much do you give away about yourself?]

Pretty much everything, except my real name unless I’d seen them a few times, but not even then. But it pretty much depends on them, like I’m honest, and I can’t lie, like I’m not a good liar. I’ve been on so many jobs where they say ‘oh, I’m so glad the agency sent you, or I picked you, you’re really easy to talk to, and some of them [other workers] are really rude’... and that’s what I’m like, I can just talk to anyone, I don’t care, I’ll just be honest [about simple facts], I’m not shy (Barry).
Irrespective of whether a worker is a low or high self-monitor, in line with Goffman’s (1959) work, the necessity of consistency in information (particularly during the relationship building phase) was commonly recognised by the sample.

As LSMs, Jack and Steve both refuse to respond to client cues in encounters, but for very different reasons. Steve, confident in his ability to provide an enjoyable service, finds it offensive when clients provide cues (either explicitly or implicitly) for him to behave in a manner incongruent with his everyday persona, and wishes to be consistent with all individuals in his working and personal life. He prides himself on the authenticity of his service and refuses to ‘play along’ with any activities he would usually shirk in his private sex life.

I’m not going to change for anyone. For one person... for the sake of an hour or whatever. I’m not going to change for one person... if they want someone who’s into role play; I’m not into role play. Playing dress ups and all that. I’m not into it... they’ll ask me if I’m into it, though. I’ve had clients ask me if I’ll wear a girl’s blouse. I said no [laughs] (Steve).

Jack refuses to respond to clients’ cues as a matter of self defense, because to do so would be to adopt a sex working persona - something he is very eager to avoid. Jack described receiving numerous verbal cues from to tell them how much he enjoys the work, and how he derives sexual pleasure from it. Nothing could be further from the truth, and Jack finds it impossible to tell the clients what they wish to hear. Instead he relays his financial reasons for involvement in the industry.

They all want to know what you do. Like, they always say ‘is this what you do for a job?’, and they ask ‘so why do you do this?’ A lot of the time I think they want me to say that I enjoy it. So I try to stick with the same story and say ‘I have to work a second job to pay off my mortgage’, and they’re like ‘ok, do you enjoy it?’ and I would love to say ‘oh what do you think, I actually enjoy this?! No, look at you, you fucking disgusting animal’ (Jack).

To summarise, high self-monitor IMSWs are more successful than their low self-monitor competitors in catering to client fantasies and expectations. However, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions due to the highly subjective nature of the data and its analysis. The evidence does indicate that HSMs are more likely to attribute their success to their ability to self-monitor, while LSMs are more likely to consider success in the industry to be a result of their ‘authenticity’. An investigation of the authenticity of workers’ profile information relative to their self-presentation in encounters (in a context of high and low self-monitoring) might inform future research with this population, as previously suggested by Phua and Caras (2008), although such an analysis
is beyond the limitations of this thesis, and would require a more detailed and reliable source of data collection than the retrospective interviewing used in this investigation.

5.7 Maintaining boundaries with clients

Sex work carries the risk that clients will make an unrequited emotional investment. Clients sometimes fall in love with workers. It is also possible for workers to fall in love with clients, although this occurs much more rarely. West and de Villiers’ study included respondents who ‘described what sounded close to real love affairs with clients’ (1992: 94). Such occurrences are not inherently dangerous - nor common (Altman 2001) - yet most sex workers are eager to avoid unwanted attachments for the sake of simplicity in their working lives. Neil reported only one experience of a client becoming overly ‘romantic’, although he was quick to dismiss it as a drunken and temporary fixation. Seth expressed mild concern that his innate empathy and personable nature made him the target of frequent client ‘crushes’, yet he conceded the most severe consequence of this (after a year of sex work) was a case of missing underwear.

One guy, he was making romantic noises and saying ‘oh, I could so fall in love with you’, blah blah. That got a bit sticky… and then he came home late one night… and he got into bed and started grabbing for me, and trying to kiss me and telling me he loved me, and I had to restrain him, but thankfully he didn’t remember anything in the morning (Neil).

People, even blokes, most of them want to feel like you actually give a shit, and I’m actually really empathetic. [This is] probably not the best career choice for me because I do like people, and I treat them as though I like them. And that can be fraught with danger as well… people fall in love all the time and one guy’s stolen [my underwear] but if that’s the worst experience you can have, then you’re doing pretty well (Seth).

Rather than a potential liability, Adam sees his personable nature as his leading asset in his sex working career. Unlike many other participants, Adam described his involvement in sex work as a calling, and has no qualms in positively identifying as a sex worker. He reported having several clients with whom he would exchange friendly and often jibing text messages, though none had caused him to be concerned about their intentions. In the passage below, Adam makes his hesitancy to construct sex work as a business clear. While he sees himself as a professional providing a valuable service, and has adopted marketing strategies along the way (as relayed in the previous chapter), he also believes that his ability to provide a ‘good’ service
depends upon his own level of enjoyment in encounters. Not only does this support the view that MSWs can and do enjoy their work (Dorais 2005; Goodley 1994; Parsons, Koken & Bimbi 2007; Prestage 1994; Rowe 2011a; Uy et al. 2004) but also suggests that for some MSWs, enjoying themselves can become a mandatory part of their working lives, and is pivotal to these workers’ success in the industry.

I’m happy to kiss my clients. Only because I enjoy kissing people, and it’s not just about their enjoyment, it’s about my enjoyment as well. It’s amazing, I hear about these escorts and they pretty much get to the end of the hour and they’re like ‘right, time’s up’. Whereas you know, AU$300, for an hour, it’s a lot of money. So I’m not going to turn around after an hour and go ‘get the fuck out’ or ‘I’m leaving’. Because it’s a business, but [I also] believe it’s a form of hospitality. The nastier [you are] and the more you just treat it like a business, I guess the less likely you are to get repeat clients and stuff. It might sound conceited, but I try to use my being a nice person to the fullest advantage (Adam, my emphasis).

Participants scarcely reported the need to remind their clients of the real context of the relationship. Miles represents an exception. Perhaps as a consequence of his ‘boyfriend experience’ marketing strategy and his proactive approach to relationship building, Miles recounted several instances where he had needed to remind clients that their relationship was a professional one. So frequent were these experiences that Miles reported feeling as though he was ‘waiting to be stalked’. This provides an example of how the construction of a worker’s online image can manifest in reality (i.e. in terms of clients’ perceptions of the nature of the relationship).

There was one message that I received that just went a little bit past [ordinary client relations]. There’s one guy who’s like ‘where’s my Christmas present, when am I going to see you next, is there a freebie?’, and I’ll be like ‘nup’. I said ‘you know I don’t do freebies, you know that’… there was another [client] where I was quite strong [about not bottoming] and I was like ‘this is how it is’. And I haven’t seen him for a little while and he texted me the other day… and I’m not cold, but just very business [like] about it. You totally have to be (Miles).

Whether or not Miles has legitimately enjoyed the encounter, he has inadvertently given the client to whom he first refers the impression that the client is somehow ‘worthy’ of receiving free services from Miles. The second client, after an extended period of seeing Miles, assumes that he is entitled to penetrate Miles, despite Miles advertising and working as a strict ‘top’. Miles reported that another client, with whom he had taken on the informal role of counsellor/social worker (an experience shared by some participants in Perkins and Bennett’s 1985 study), had
contacted him numerous times with messages of adulation, causing Miles to feel uncomfortable and to enforce the boundaries he saw necessary.

[The client messaged me on New Year’s Eve saying] ‘I hope you’re having a good night, I just wanted to send you a message, just to say I think you’re amazing, and I’m changing my life because of you’, and it’s just like [sigh]. So I didn’t respond to it, I responded to him online a week later, saying ‘oh I forgot to write back to your message, I hope you’re well, and 2011 is really [good]’. I think he’d just been through a bad breakup, and trust is an issue, and the therapist in me comes out - I’m not a therapist, but I’ve just got that kind of caring personality (Miles).

Echoing Seth’s perspective on his own personality and the effect it has on his work, Miles expresses concern about being ‘too nice’, and potentially (albeit unintentionally) misleading clients into believing he is involved in their lives in ways he is not.

In contrast, Bailey actively seeks to have his clients fall in love with him. By observing his clients’ personal tastes, he is able to manipulate them into thinking they have found a person with whom they share interests. In doing so, Bailey is able to extract as many gifts and cash bonuses from the client as possible. According to West and de Villiers, this is a common approach adopted by male sex workers, as ultimately for the client, the idea that the ‘rent boy partner is getting any pleasure for himself, or getting any pleasure out of trying to please, is often nothing but a sad illusion’ (1992: 93). Bailey describes a scenario that captures this ‘sad illusion’ referred to by West and de Villiers below.

Generally I try to build a relationship with them, and always try to make them fall in love with me. So from listening to them, you can get a drift of what they like and what they don’t like. And then, if you have a long enough conversation with them, the sex is amazing [for them], because you’ve already figured out what they like and what they don’t like, [essentially] a profile, and how they like it in the bedroom, and how they don’t like it, you know, from what job they do, to how they interact with you... when they offer you a drink and stuff like that. I can build a profile of them and I know exactly what they want. I have clients that take me out to dinner and the theatre instead of just having sex – because all they want to do is talk... I got paid eight hours to sun bake one day, [and drank] three bottles of French champagne... there are tricks to making them fall in love with you to a point, and then drawing away from them, which then makes them want you more and then you can get more out of them... I’ve received gifts – I got a AU$2500 watch from one of my clients for Christmas (Bailey).

Finally, Tyrone reported becoming emotionally attached to ‘nice’ clients, who often provide him with a ‘relationship’ more functional than any in his personal experience. Tyrone confessed to using sex work as a means of satisfying not only his sexual urges, but also his emotional needs.
Sometimes they’re really hot, quite often I guess, and sometimes the clients want a relationship, and if they’re getting jealous of what I do, there’s nothing I can do… I don’t trust relationships anymore, and I can just do this for now – sometimes the clients are [nicer] than a boyfriend, and sometimes they are not as nice but they’re just clients, so I don’t mind (Tyrone).

As he relates in the above passage, Tyrone is able to dissociate from a client easily, and remind himself of the true context of the relationship, if the client does not meet his expectations. When a client is suitably ‘nice’ he will treat them as a romantic partner.

As broadly as these approaches to maintaining boundaries vary, all participants routinely draw boundaries with clients to avoid entering into a genuine, long-term (i.e. non-commercial) relationship. Such boundaries allow them to continue working without romantic complications and strive towards success in the industry. There is one notable exception. Ironically, the case of a worker surrendering to a committed relationship with a client is not the story of the end of a sex working career, but rather forms the basis of a very lucrative one indeed.

5.8 A recipe for success in IMSW? A case study

Among the varying levels of affection (and unrequited emotional attachment) conveyed when participants spoke of their clients, the closest experience to resemble a ‘love affair’ was reported by Jared. Jared is what some researchers (Allen 1980; Taylor & Francis 1989) term a ‘kept boy’. Scott provides an account of the manner in which such men are portrayed in the social science literature on male sex work:

The effeminate character of the kept-boy was emphasised in the portrayal of him as an unproductive consumer, given over to an ‘easy’ life… We are not allowed to sympathise with the kept-boy. While other prostitutes have been forced, tricked or seduced into prostitution, we are led to believe that the kept-boy, regardless of what may have initially led him into prostitution, has been a willful participant in his own demise (2005a: 195).

In an analysis of ‘success’ in the online male sex industry (particularly in a context of economic returns), twenty-six-year-old Jared’s situation is most relevant. At the time of his interview, Jared was living in a three-storey luxury townhouse in Melbourne’s inner-city. The glamorous property, where Jared lives with his partner Dave (also a sex worker), is owned by Jared’s ‘sugar daddy’ Rob, an older, wealthy, married, ‘family man’ and ex-client. For most MSWs, acquiring a ‘sugar daddy’ is more of a fantasy than a realistic possibility. In the rare event that a worker finds one, the arrangement is usually short-lived (Browne & Minichiello 1995). Jared is the only sex worker
in this study’s sample to claim any significant and long-term experience with a sugar daddy (although others such as Matheus, Bailey, Neil and Raymond mentioned extravagant gifts such as electronics and holidays).

In addition to his opulent rent-free accommodation, Jared receives an annual ‘gift’ or salary of AU$90,000. Although he could easily afford to forgo further sex work, Jared continues to advertise online, adding new regulars to his sizeable client base. He estimates his average weekly earnings to be between AU$1,500 and AU$3,000 (in addition to his salary). As noted in Chapter Three, Jared has twice supplemented his earnings with lucrative working holidays in Dubai. In exchange for his largesse, Rob asks only that Jared make himself available once per month for a ‘sleepover’, usually in a luxury hotel. Rob is unfazed by Jared’s romantic relationship with Dave. While Jared does claim to care for Rob, he admits that it is unlikely he would be in a ‘relationship’ with Rob were it not for the financial freedom he provides.

By most definitions Jared is a highly successful escort who bolsters his earning capacity in a variety of ways. However, he notes that his success in the industry has come at a personal cost. Jared spoke of being ‘addicted to the lifestyle’ his benefactor provides, a lifestyle that (barring his independent sex work earnings) could be taken from him swiftly in the event of a serious altercation with Rob. Yet Jared’s greater concern is the impact his lifestyle has made upon his sense of self, and upon his relationships with his friends.

It fucks with my head, with who I really am. Because ‘Jared’ has so many different personalities, and sometimes I find myself being really quite judgmental at times, when I shouldn’t be, even about friends. It’s really quite disgusting and I get quite ashamed of it that I get that way, and I have to snap myself out of it and say ‘I’m not this sort of person, I’m just the guy from the country’…sometimes I find myself judging my friends, thinking: ‘what are you people doing? You’ve never travelled, you’re living in crappy accommodation, you don’t have a car, and you work at Coles’, just really negative comments. But then I [say to myself] ‘well, wait, you’re a sex worker’, so it’s not like I’m doing brain surgery, it’s just that I’ve been incredibly fortunate to meet the right people. So I’ve got to snap out of that way of thinking, because I hate that person…. I mean my friend can be proud because they’ve bought a new Ford Festiva, and I can’t be happy for them, I’m like ‘well, I have a European sports car, big deal about your Ford Festiva’, and that’s disgusting because that’s not who I want to be. I don’t get invited to any of my friend’s houses anymore because they’re too ashamed that I’ll go over there and judge them… and that’s what fucks with my head, that I’ve created this person who isn’t very approachable with my friends (Jared).

72 This issue is explored further in the following chapter.
Immersion in the sex industry and its tangible rewards has provided Jared with a comfortable (and heavily materialistic) lifestyle. At the same time, Jared’s financial success has alienated him from his friends, although it should be noted that this alienation is not the result of his sex work per se, but rather due to his upward mobility (via an enhanced access to economic resources), impacting upon the manner in which he judges others’ worth.

Jared’s prosperity could be considered a liability to his working and personal life, and therefore more suited to the discussion in the following chapter. However, the material benefits he gains from his situation locates Jared’s case within the previously defined context of success.

5.9 Conclusions

A range of strategies are employed by Internet-based male sex workers in order to achieve success in the online sex industry. This chapter has sought to identify the strategies used by IMSWs offline, beyond their advertising, with the aim of securing and maintaining their client base, and has examined the perceptions of industry success held by interviewees. Many of the tactics discussed are applicable to all forms of private sex work and not to Internet-based work alone. This suggests that, bar a few exceptions (e.g. the freedom to mention clothing and props), the Internet has little influence in shaping the outcome of the encounter itself. It can, however, provide the dominant mode of communication between clients and workers following the initial encounter.

Effective strategies for success involve a range of physical and intuitive work. Such strategies include the active construction of sex work as a business, using clothes and props, refraining from ‘clockwatching’, maintaining a focus on relationship building, setting personal boundaries and engaging in self-monitoring to respond to client tastes. Despite the range of approaches adopted to deal with clients in encounters, those participants willing to engage in high levels of self-monitoring felt more readily able to cater to the perceived emotional, physical and sexual desires of both short and long-term clients.

Finally, the situation of a highly ‘successful’ worker (Jared) has been described in detail, highlighting the prized circumstance of securing wealthy and generous clients as a means of attaining success in the private online industry, and reflecting the general consensus of participants’ definition of success. Many MSWs do achieve success in the online industry, and there are a range of benefits unique to online male sex work (as outlined in Chapter Three).
However, this new medium also carries issues that negatively impact men working online, alongside an inability to address established issues universal among men involved in sex work. These issues are the subject of the final chapter of the thesis.
Chapter Six:

Issues and needs among Internet-based male sex workers in Melbourne

‘This whole law thing is bullshit; it’s hard enough as it is for us to make money, and they’re just trying to make it harder, which is not fair’ (Barry).

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapters in this thesis have identified the factors that explain the emergence of the Internet as a practical and viable MSW marketplace, while outlining the approaches taken by individuals to engage a client base successfully. However, new technologies that appear to provide greater convenience in our personal and/or working lives frequently carry with them new issues and unforeseen complications. The discussion now turns to the issues and structural factors associated with IMSW that adversely affect workers’ experiences. While previous chapters have noted the advantages associated with Internet-based work and delineated the success that can be found in the industry (as understood by those participating in IMSW), this discussion outlines more routine matters linked with IMSW, alongside the notable disadvantages and concerns raised in the course of interviews with participants. These reported experiences serve, to an extent, to undermine assertions that Internet-based work is superior to other forms of MSW.

The inspiration for this chapter lies in the recent *SHANTUSI* study (2011a) conducted by James Rowe, in addition to the work of Parsons, Koken and Bimbi (2007). Rowe’s study is concerned with two elements – surveying the prevalence of HIV and high-risk sex practices in the illicit sex industry in Victoria, Australia (across male, female and transgender workers in street, Internet and illegal brothel-based work), and ‘need’ across the industry. The latter study by Parsons and colleagues concerns ‘individual and community needs’ of IMSWs in the US. Both qualitative studies are commendable in their attempts to identify the issues affecting this population, given that most research with Internet-based (male) sex workers has been carried out from afar (i.e. through analyses of websites). There are, however, limitations to these studies. Instead of focusing on the needs of a single gender of sex worker, Rowe’s exploratory investigation attempts to encompass notions of need in relation to male, female and transgender workers as a unified group. The results of Parsons and colleagues’ study of US based IMSWs cannot necessarily be extrapolated to the Melbourne IMSW population. This chapter contains an
The focus of this study is upon IMSW; however the need for further exploration of the activities of Internet-based female and transgender sex workers might inform future research agendas.

This once more illustrates the rhetoric of ‘sex as work’ at play, subverting the well-established legal, social and moral discourse of ‘prostitution’.
as a sex worker, in the case of print or Internet-based workers). Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV) is responsible for providing regulatory oversight and information to sex workers, and there is regular communication between the two bodies.

Section 17 of the Act stipulates the manner in which workers may advertise. Workers are forbidden to describe the sexual services they provide\(^\text{75}\); advertise via radio or television; offer employment (in the case of agencies/brothels); use the words 'masseuse', 'massage' or 'remedial'; use photographs depicting any part of themselves below the head and shoulders (i.e. body shots); or refer to their health status or ethnicity. In practice, very little information may be provided about the physicality of the worker (i.e. that which might be expected to pique a client's interest). A worker is forbidden to offer sexual services from a fixed location (i.e. provide ‘incalls’), and may only accept ‘outcalls’.

Scott argues that while sex workers are not expected to be ‘normal’ members of the community, they are expected to be ‘good’ sex workers, by being ‘hygienic and socially responsible’ (2005a: 239). Until recently, workers were required to be tested for HIV and other blood borne viruses (BBVs) every three months, and tested monthly for STIs such as gonorrhea using oral swabs. On October 5\(^\text{th}\) 2012, the Victorian Minister for Health, David Davis, amended the Act to reduce monthly swab testing to every three months, to coincide with tests for BBVs (Victoria Government Gazette 2012) – a move welcomed by sex worker activist groups such as the Scarlet Alliance.

These legislative restrictions are intended to apply to the professional activities of all sex workers in some way. In particular, the requirement to restrict images to the head and shoulders presents a quandary for Internet-based sex workers who wish to provide a detailed representation of their physicality. This regulation is particularly burdensome for male workers given their greater likelihood to include information about their ‘physical assets’ (e.g. Koken, Bimbi & Parsons 2010) and to rely on sexualised imagery in keeping with the values of sexual objectification inherent in gay culture (Jeffreys 2003). Clients expect IMSWs to detail their

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\(^{75}\) However, many of the participants’ detailed (and explicit) descriptions of their services demonstrate the limited adherence to such legislative requirements.
physical assets and sexual activities explicitly, with categories such as penis size and sexual role (e.g. top/bottom/versatile) central to workers’ profiles on websites such as Gaydar.\footnote{This is not to suggest that female and transgender workers do not provide such ‘vital statistics’ in their online advertising, but rather that such categories are clearly delineated for both commercial and non-commercial users of this particular website.}

In December 2010, perhaps alerted by the aforementioned research, the BLA initiated a compliance campaign in response to the vast numbers of sex workers advertising in contravention to the legislation. BLA representatives contacted the operators of Gaydar and Rentboy to ensure website users (i.e. male sex workers) were adhering to the stipulations outlined in the Sex Work Act. According to Seth, this contact ‘scared the shit out of [Rentboy]’. While the operators of the Rentboy website have since sought to enforce the legislative demands of the Act with some success, Gaydar continues to ignore BLA demands, primarily due to the its status as an ‘offshore’, or overseas operated website. As of August 2012, every professional profile on Gaydar continues to features photographs of workers’ torsos in contravention of the Sex Work Act, while the majority feature photographs of buttocks and/or penises. As a sex worker, it is unrealistic to rely on facial photographs to attract business, as most clients require information regarding the worker’s body type and penis size.

As Gaydar dodges the BLA with its offshore status, Australian-based website Rentboy is unable to escape the requirements of Victorian law. The operators of the website have subsequently mandated head and shoulder shots from its members. The following message has been displayed on the home page since January 2011.

ATTN: CLIENTS, Our Melbourne/Victoria section listings are reduced from normal due to change of the new Victorian law as of Nov 2010. More ads will be available soon. Please be patient when we are getting the content compliant with Victorian law.

ATTN: ESCORTS, Please update your ad/text/photos to compile \textit{sic} with the new Law - see a summary here. Then you will be able to display your ads back on-line. For more information, please login, read notice and contact Webmasters.

Prior to the specific and direct demand to comply with legislative requirements issued in December 2010, all workers advertising on Rentboy displayed body shots in their online profiles. This notice instantly resulted in a reduced number of profiles fit for display (as observed over the period September 2010 – February 2011). At the time of the BLA campaign, photographs were entirely restricted to head and shoulder shots. As of January 2013, photographs remain notionally restricted to the head and shoulders, although many extend to
the upper torso and chest – indicating that time has eroded the urge to comply for workers and Rentboy operators.

6.3 SWA numbers and workers’ responses to legislative frameworks

Under the Sex Work Act, each sex worker in the state of Victoria must be in possession of a SWA number. There are, however, many IMSWs currently advertising without this licensing requirement. Many workers consider acquiring a SWA problematic, with only six of the 23 IMSWs interviewed claiming to be in possession of one. Several admitted adopting counterfeit PCA numbers (as SWA numbers were named under the Prostitution Control Act 1994 prior to November 2010), and some of these illegitimate numbers may still be in use.

Participants expressed concern that their registration as a sex worker could have long-term consequences, in the form of a ‘black mark’ against their name. Raymond is concerned that ‘it wrecks travelling prospects, so if you’re travelling you won’t be allowed to get into some countries’, suggesting that current or lapsed registration as a sex worker is justification for some countries to refuse an entry visa (in the same manner as a drug conviction). Anthony also fears that formal registration would ‘really affect’ his future travel plans, particularly for the USA. Other concerns related to obtaining a SWA number were voiced by Seth and Miles. Both considered the possibility of having their details on file for the remainder of their lives a danger to their prospects in high profile fields such as medicine and academia.

I don’t know where we’re at exactly with technology and the Internet, but I feel you gotta really try and look after your own privacy. My friends don’t know I do this, why should however many at this office [the BLA]. I don’t know how many would have [my details], because you don’t get to go there and find out. [I’m worried because] there’s this little chance that I might do something public, and something where people judge your history. And it’s not like we don’t have instances where these sorts of things have been used to bring people down (Seth).

Privacy is privacy. I don’t use my real name to my clients, why should I use [it with the government?]… I don’t want my name held in a public record. Once it’s there, it’s there. People can draw upon it… and it’s going to be drawn upon at some point in time. I’m

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77 On several occasions, despite the participant claiming to registered, I was not convinced this was the case. Answers in relation to the process of acquiring a number were vague and it is fair to suggest they may have fabricated a story for fear of me not being who I said I was (i.e. a fear of entrapment, as discussed later in this chapter).
fully aware of that … I work out in my head [if I’m caught by authorities] all the reasons [to explain] why I’ve done it, and this kind of statement – I’ve done it for this reason, and this and this and this – as to whether anyone buys it, I don’t care (Miles).

Barry’s comment below highlights that concerns regarding registration extend beyond the IMSW population to women and transgender workers. It also introduces another key issue in Internet-based work – the fragmented and misinformation-ridden nature of the community.

Nobody I know wants to do it [get registered], [not] the females [nor] the trannies. There are a lot of rumours about how it goes on your permanent record and affects where you can travel to… [and that] you have to declare half of your income for tax.

[Did Consumer Affairs tell you that directly?]

No, but that’s what I heard they do (Barry).

A phone call to a CAV officer revealed that sex work registration in Victoria cannot be linked to an individual’s identification (e.g. passport). Further, there is no public register of sex workers, and registration is entirely confidential, with sex workers’ details available only to the director of CAV and staff within the sex work division, or to senior police officers upon request, who must undergo a strict identity check. The perceptions held by the participants quoted above are unfounded, and serve as an example of the manner in which mythology and misinformation can permeate a population with weak ties to peers and services (i.e. those who could clarify such misconceptions). The correct information was not difficult to obtain. This suggests that workers could be doing more to investigate their professional rights and obligations, and further their use of the Internet as an investigative tool (in terms of researching their marketing approach and potential clients).

Temporary and intermittent involvement in sex work is a common occurrence (Aggleton 1999; Prestage 1994; Uy et al. 2004). Some participants, such as Brian, Miles, and Joseph, were unwilling to obtain a registration number for fear that it would mean they were ‘officially’ a sex worker, rather than someone temporarily pursuing an alternative career choice.

[Are you registered?]

No, no I don’t [have a SWA number]. I wouldn’t really even know how to get one. The way that I’m doing it, I work for maybe a month every year, or 2 months every couple of years, just whenever I’ve needed the money… I just couldn’t be arsed organising all that for something that I’m not doing full time. I know a few escorts and that’s their [full-time] job. That’s what they do, for years and years, so [I can understand the need for a SWA
number]. So... registering, it just seems like a big waste of time... I wouldn’t even know how [to go about it] (Brian).

Well, the main reason [for not registering] is because I feel that if I had the number, it’s so much more confirmed [that I’m a sex worker] (Miles).

I tend to focus on standard massage, and the other stuff I do is more at my discretion, it’s not the sort of main thing I want to advertise. And that’s probably why I don’t go through with it. I think it’s also for my own personal boundaries, so I’m not an actual sex worker that actually provides sex all the time. So I think that’s probably a personal reason, and sort of a boundary that I don’t want to [cross] (Joseph).

Each excerpt above displays evidence of dissociative strategies in action. Whether it be because the worker ‘can’t be arsed’, or desires sex work to remain peripheral in his life, or seeks to maintain a focus on massage rather than sexual services (i.e. body workers), such active distancing from sex work is indicative of a negative identification with it as a profession (as addressed later in this chapter).

While some IMSWs interviewed reported investing considerable effort in enquiring how they might obtain a SWA number, others displayed their lack of understanding of the entire process and broader legislative context.

This guy I met yesterday was saying: ‘how’s your working been since they brought in all these laws?’ and I was like: ‘what laws?’ And he said there have been some new laws or something about escorts, disclosing their status, things that I’m like: ‘what?’ (Kent).

During his investigation of the legislated process, Seth found the BLA to be ‘the most disorganised, ad hoc organisation I’ve ever [dealt with] in my life’. Barry and Karl expressed similar confusion over the process. They also admitted that registration would force them to pay tax on their earnings – likely a significant factor in the decision of many workers not to register. To expand upon the point made in Chapter Three in relation to economic gain; in an industry that is practically unregulated, few workers have any incentive to disclose their private details to a government body, potentially for life, to have their earnings significantly taxed.

While Rentboy specifies that its advertisers must be in possession of a SWA number, and each worker does list a number, it is reasonable to assume that some of these are counterfeit, as no participants reported the need to provide documentary evidence of the registration’s validity to
Rentboy. Due to its offshore nature, Gaydar does not require workers to comply with the regulations concerning photographs, nor to provide a SWA number. To counter the legal requirement of registration, and in order to minimise the possibility of being charged for the illegal sale of sexual services (i.e. a fear of entrapment as discussed later in this chapter), many men (on both Gaydar and Rentboy) choose to adopt disclaimers at the feet of their profiles such as the following:

Please note that for legal reasons the discussion of rates and exchange of money is for the time we spend together. The discussion of sex in any context and at any time, regardless of its intended purposes in asking, will be discussed by me strictly from my personal preferences and NOT in any type of context that might be construed as an exchange for money, even if implicitly described as such by either party(s). I hope that you will consider hiring my time as a companion. What you are paying for is my time only. Whatever we choose to do is mutually consensual between consenting adults, and as equals.

Considering that all men on Rentboy ostensibly possess a SWA number, and the explicit context of their work, such a disclaimer might be considered unnecessary. Its purpose is to provide an extra layer of ‘insurance’ against prosecution under legislation that participants acknowledge is confusing and difficult to comprehend.

As a further means of circumventing legislative requirements, and in order to continue advertising in a manner that showcases their physical attributes, some workers have discovered and exploited perceived legislative ‘loopholes’. Seth now advertises in the NSW or Sydney-based section of Gaydar and Rentboy where such restrictions are seldom enforced (Avgoustinos et al. 2010), although he makes it clear to potential clients that he is available for appointments in Melbourne. Jared advertises in adherence to regulations, but refers clients to a private website that he uses to advertise his services as a porn actor, and where they may view countless nude photographs. Despite the ability of workers to evade legislative requirements, there are a range of negative outcomes directly associated with the legislation, as discussed below.

6.4 Impacts of legislative frameworks on IMSWs

The impact of the Victorian legislative framework, and the recent calls for compliance with this framework, has been felt strongly by some IMSWs (and no doubt female and transgender workers), while others have all but ignored it. Seth claimed to have noticed a decrease in client
contact, while Barry noted the fear and uncertainty that some clients harbour while engaging in illicit activity (which may lead them to reconsider purchasing sexual services):

I would say there’s been a downturn since [the calls for compliance]. *Rentboy* has been about 30 per cent [of my work]. And it was... better because it was a lot of business [men], hotel kind of stuff (Seth).

A lot of clients are aware of this PCA thing as well, and I think they’re worried about breaking the law too, so I guess it’s just died off a bit (Barry).

However, due to the removal of non-compliant advertisements by *Rentboy*, as well as the panic that may have led some unregistered workers to remove their own, Anthony remarked that a diminished availability of workers had allowed some IMSWs to charge more per hour, driving the market price upwards.

I’ve found it’s more expensive in Melbourne lately because since the whole PCA number thing came up, a lot of ads have disappeared – from *Rentboy* and *Gaydar* as well (Anthony).

Tom, the only research participant who had adhered to regulations before the BLA ‘crackdown’, expressed that compelling workers to comply with the laws was a good thing in the interests of equity among the competition.

I think it’s fair, because there’s workers like myself who have been abiding by those regulations since day dot. And those workers who don’t, I don’t know whether they’ve had an advantage because of it, in terms of more clients, or more regular bookings, or the clients that they do see are more likely to rebook them, and I just think they need to be a lot more fair [sic]. Because not everybody has body shots, the customers are more likely to be forced to enquire, so it’s more labour intensive in getting that initial client to be happy enough to make the booking (Tom).

Jack also adopted this perspective, considering the regulations to provide for a ‘level playing field’. Workers who are prepared to abide by the legislation are resentful of those who advertise in breach of the regulations and are perceived to be attracting more clients (e.g. Kent). Further issues surrounding equity in the ‘workplace’ were raised with regards to ethical obligations towards client groups in their access to sexual services. In the excerpt below, Sam questions the reasonability of expecting an individual to pay hundreds of dollars to secure a sexual service from an escort whose appearance they are forbidden to assess in advance.
I thought, if it was me, if I was a client, I’d want to see more pictures [than just a head and shoulder shot] before I paid for a service (Sam).

While photographs can still be traded in private, the nature of client demand (as discussed in the previous chapter) is such that clients seek immediate confirmation of what ‘specimen’ of manhood is available for a commercial sexual encounter, and may not wish to engage in a lengthy and time-consuming process of photographic exchange. An individual who wishes to advertise according to the regulations, but does not wish to show his face, is in a farcical position of selling his services based on a photograph of a shoulder or the back of his head. In a situation where a client opts to hire a worker without adequate photographic evidence of his appearance, the worker, if deemed inadequate for the occasion, may be turned away.

If you look at profiles now, they’re bloody ridiculous; it’s just someone’s shoulder, and that’s all they’re showing. I wouldn’t want to invest AU$200-300 of my hard earned money to catch up with somebody if I don’t know what they look like. And I know a few of my friends have gone and they’ve been rejected by certain people, like ‘oh, you’re not quite what I’m looking for’ (Jared).

Beyond the concerns expressed by participants in relation to a loss in trade, a ‘level playing field’, and a professional responsibility to provide sufficient information for clients, the recent enforcement of legislative requirements has instilled a fear of police entrapment. Previous studies of private MSWs has shown this population to express little anxiety in relation to law enforcement (Parsons, Koken & Bimbi 2004; West & de Villiers 1992). Such complacency was evident among participants in this study; however, some interviewees reported genuine anxiety regarding the possibility of police entrapment. Castle and Lee (2008:18) point to the ‘anonymity of the Internet’ as a possible deterrent to law enforcers who do not have the resources to investigate individuals, and Weitzer (2005) considers the police to be more concerned with street workers due to their visibility. Yet the recent ‘crackdown’ and requests for compliance with advertising regulations have induced a state of fear (among at least five of the 17 unregistered or non-compliant workers that took part in this study). These fears exist despite an absence of evidence to suggest that any workers are being caught. As noted by Tom (an individual well connected to this milieu), the alleged investigation of workers appears to be based upon rumour as opposed to substantiated action by authorities.

The degree of this anxiety varied among those interviewed. Miles felt as though he would be able to ‘talk his way out of anything’, and provide a ‘sob story’ in the event that he was caught.
[I would] cry innocent [and say] ‘I’d never do it again, I’m really sorry, I didn’t realise, [I was] strapped for cash, I just kind of fell into it’…. the sob story. I think I could get away with that once. I mean I’ve been doing this for 3 years and I haven’t had a problem (Miles).

Conversely, Seth was in a state of constant fear and mistrust, to the extent that on the day of our interview, he observed me from afar to determine whether or not I might be a police officer.

I [recently] started to feel really nervous, I kept thinking that people were [watching me] and the next one was going to be [trouble]. And you can meet some weirdos, so every time I was like ‘this is a cop, this one, this is entrapment’ (Seth).

As noted in the methodology chapter, the difficulty of the recruitment process for this study likely stemmed from this fear of entrapment. Rather than breach regulations and live in fear, Barry was so ‘freaked out’ by news of the ‘crackdown’ that he deleted his Gaydar profile and opted to pursue much less lucrative work in a brothel. His experience is an example of regulations impacting upon a worker’s earning ability, and creating serious financial need - particularly for those lacking the skills, ambition or desire to work elsewhere (i.e. ‘straight’ or mainstream work).

I didn’t know until Gaydar sent me this big thing, this big message about [how] if you want to renew your ad, you have to conform to the Victorian laws. And when I got that I just freaked out and closed my account, and that’s when I worked at the brothel. And it was so dead; I couldn’t pay my rent or anything. Some days I’d get three jobs in one day, and then others I wouldn’t get any – I was like ‘I have to live here, to make money’…. but yeah, [ultimately] I didn’t change anything, I just put it [my profile] back up (Barry).

Similarly, Matt considered quitting sex work as a result of communications between Gaydar and the BLA.

When the warnings came up saying ‘all above the shoulder’ I just went ‘this is getting too much, I don’t care enough about it [to continue working]’ (Matt).

However, like Barry, Matt also decided to continue to risk working unregistered. Participants offered suggestions for the design of a more fair and workable legislative framework. While some workers wished to do away with legislative complications altogether, this is not a realistic course of action. Participants frequently reported feeling frustrated in their communications with the BLA and CAV. Few participants knew of or felt the need to seek advice from Victoria’s sex worker support and advisory body, RhED, and the easiest option for them was to avoid registration altogether. Further, the lack of compulsion to promote compliance with the regulations on Gaydar in the same manner as Rentboy leaves many workers in a legislative
‘grey area’. The lack of consistent communication between agencies and websites renders the regulations ineffective, yet still able to provoke anxiety among the affected population, as relayed by Jack below.

[Several times I have] emailed support [at Gaydar] or something, and they don’t respond, or they respond to you in a very [vague] way. There was one [time], I didn’t realise at that point in time that there were Victorian laws, and how strict the laws were, and I had posted photos that were against the law. And I emailed them and thought, ‘look, I’m breaching the law, and I need you to remove my profile’ and this was after several attempts to say ‘look can you [inform me what to do?] – I’ll try to change things’ and tried to contact them. And to this day, the profile is still on that site, and they have made no effort to contact me (Jack).

As noted by Rowe (2011a), the situation dictates that workers must self-regulate, yet this leads many to circumstances where risk and financial self-interest rule over compliance.

Participants recommended changes to legislation in relation to photographs and profile information. Essentially, workers desire the freedom to use whichever types of photographs they wish (not solely head and shoulder shots as mandated by the Sex Work Act), and also to include information pertaining to sexual services offered, ethnicity and physical ‘stats’ (e.g. penis size). These desires are based upon the belief that more body shots and information will result in the acquisition of more clients, with less time spent in the tedious exchange of photographs and responding to queries about sexual services. This is, of course, contingent upon the clients who pay attention to textual information in workers’ advertising. A decreased emphasis on the workers’ head and shoulders is linked with the notion of privacy - something that all individuals (and especially sex workers) are entitled to expect, even if their advertisements are in the public domain.

If you can’t put any details [in a profile] then you spend a lot of time… messaging back and forth… to decide whether or not they want your service. With Rentboy [because of the limited information I can provide on the site] I generally get contacted by email and it generally tends to be a long feed of emails back and forth to try to arrange stuff and I really just get over it, because I really just like quick [arrangements to be made] (Bailey).

To summarise, participants, alongside activist and advocacy organisations such as RhED and Scarlet Alliance, consider the current legislative context unnecessarily harsh and restrictive. Given that the websites in question are no more accessible than the average pornographic website; little credence may be awarded to any justification claiming to protect the public from explicit imagery. The current legislative framework does have the potential to cause
complications for IMSWs, including financial losses, compromised privacy, and anxiety. However, another source of anxiety for IMSWs is concern for their own safety.

6.5 Safety among IMSWs

The ability of many IMSWs to choose and screen their clients, thereby increasing perceptions of safety, provides a contrast to workers who solicit for sex work in person (whether on the streets or via a brothel introduction). However, IMSWs are not immune to the threat of danger or violence. This is due to the furtive, unaccompanied and ‘behind closed doors’ nature of their activities (Parsons, Koken & Bimbi 2007: 230), with 3.4% of Minichiello and colleagues’ sample across varying sites reporting experiences with violence over a two week period (1999). Weitzer (2005), in reviewing the MSW literature, suggests that MSWs are less likely than females to experience violence or coercion in their work. Prestage (1994: 178) attributes the low incidence of violence against MSWs to a type of camaraderie found between MSWs and their clients (an understanding rooted in the shared stigma of homosexuality), while Scott (2005a) considers it to be a result of clients seeking to protect their identity. Without dismissing the potentiality of its existence, focusing on physical violence as a common occurrence within this population outside of street work ‘gives a wrong impression of the humdrum reality of male prostitution’ (West & de Villiers 1992: x) and overlooks verbal abuse as the most common form of violence (Scott et al. 2005).

Inconsistent with recent data (e.g. Rowe 2011a) documenting the atrocities committed against sex workers in Melbourne (in particular female street-based workers), not one research participant related an experience to suggest that clients pose a physical threat to IMSWs.

Well, all the escorts I’ve spoken to, none of them have ever [been assaulted]. I think the media are only ever going to sell stories that grab your attention, and I think 99.9 per cent of clients are regular guys who treat you with respect, and they’re not worth a story... I’ve never encountered anything where I’ve felt unsafe, or under threat (Adam).

It’s no different to meeting someone on Gaydar, Grindr, any of those [social networking or dating sites], going to their house. It’s no different at all. And the way I used to do it, is write down the address of where I was going for my flat mate in a book, and write the phone number so if I didn’t come back [he would know] that’s where I was going. But you know it’s exactly the same as picking someone up at a club. The only difference is these people are going to give you money – or apparently – you would hope (Santos).
There’s people I haven’t warmed to and haven’t had a great time [with], but there’s never been people that have been rude. I’ve never been in that situation, I wouldn’t want to be. I’ve never… felt unsafe (Miles).

Many of the men interviewed were young, strong and physically fit, and while some claimed not to be able to ‘fight their way out of a paper bag’ (Adam), it was important to them to appear capable of defending themselves. While physical violence is not a great concern, the perception of its existence keeps many workers alert, particularly those such as a Jack who are uncomfortable with their work.

Sometimes just the fear – when you walk into someone’s house, like – it’s scary. And there’s been times when I’ve pulled up to go and walk in to someone’s house and just ran – and thought ‘I’m not going in there’. Like once [the door was open and] there were no lights on and he called for me to come to the back of the house, and I just left (Jack).

One safety strategy described by participants includes telling a trusted friend of their whereabouts. Others survey the premises to detect any potential threats and escape routes (as recommended by the RhED website).

Safety is always at the forefront of my mind, at every new meeting, but I’ve never had an incident, I’ve always been able to look after myself, and there’s techniques that I use to make sure I remain in control. If it’s a hotel, usually I know the staff, the concierge, and I have no issues. In terms of personal homes, there’s a lot more at risk, you don’t know who’s going to be there, and if it’s a large home and I haven’t been able to walk straight through, and see what’s going on, if I don’t feel as though I know what’s going on in each room, or if I have a suspicion that something’s not quite right, again [I’ll ask] ‘can I use your bathroom?’ It allows me to have a circuit breaker, and then I might ask them to give me a tour, ‘who lives here?’ you know, and eventually be comfortable enough to finish the booking… but [ultimately] I know that I’ve got enough muscle on me to look after myself (Tom).

Despite the lack of physical violence experienced by (Internet-based) MSWs that took part in this research, its potential cannot be eliminated. Further, there is evidence of other unpleasant realities inherent in the work that impact upon workers’ wellbeing. Five participants reported receiving verbal abuse, and some described incidents where they were stalked by clients after a commercial contact – an occurrence that may not be isolated.

[The client] was getting frustrated that he hadn’t blown [ejaculated], and the time had come for me to go. I’d stayed a bit longer for him to try to blow, but he [hadn’t] so I had to go. Before I got out of his car… he was being verbally aggressive because he wanted to
cum… I decided not to see him again. He got online and used to abuse me [over the Internet] as well (Raymond).

As far as sex work though, clients don’t fuck with my head, they’re fine, unless they develop an infatuation where they get a bit stalker-ish… it’s more annoying because it borders on my personal life too. One person in particular, he kept coming here and harassing, not me, but my partner… He’d rock up at odd hours of the night, of the day, ringing the bell and whatever, but I got rid of him by messaging him repeatedly, telling him to fuck off (Jared).

As highlighted by Raymond, an issue unique to this medium is the ability of clients/individuals to harass workers online, irrespective of whether they have used the worker’s services or not. Yet a lack of access to (or understanding of) tactics to improve safety are not the source of workers’ anxiety with regards to safety. As noted, such information is readily accessible across a number of local websites (e.g. RhED, Scarlet Alliance) should workers feel inclined to investigate and employ such tactics. Rather, for the many workers that are unregistered, it is the threat of the need to seek police assistance after a violent incident that engenders fear - or at least unease in respect of the consequences of their own illegal activities coming to light. In fact, the desire for police protection (in the event it was needed) was the primary reason for Tyrone to become registered. Seth is a burly man, yet he still expressed concern that he might be unable to defend himself in an emergency, and desires the option of seeking help.

Just on the off chance that something could happen, I should feel completely capable of going to the police and feeling 100 per cent entitled to protection or whatever, and I’m sure that in a lot of ways I would be. But because I am breaking laws I kind of feel a bit hesitant to do that and… that’s a really dangerous situation to be in (Seth).

Seth’s statement is evidence of a serious disconnection between law enforcement and physical protection for sex workers (of the kind that would be expected in a brothel environment) which serves to compound issues of isolation. This isolation, and other issues including sex work stigma (necessitating dissociative techniques), are discussed below.

6.6 Coping with stigma

The Internet provides a forum that has allowed MSWs to counter many of the problematic aspects of their chosen career, whether long-term or temporary, as previously highlighted in this thesis (e.g. the exercise of greater levels of autonomy, flexibility and remuneration). However,
the transformation undergone by the industry has not been sufficient to address individuals’ responses to a number of structural and social factors associated with sex work. Coping with stigma, as well as the physically and emotionally taxing nature of regular sexual relations with strangers (including ‘undesirables’) can affect the psychological wellbeing of IMSWs. Stigma and shame are separate to secrecy and prudence when considering issues around disclosure. The former is likely to generate negative feelings in relation to how the individual and their activities are perceived socially, while the latter is motivated by the impact that participation in illicit activities may have on an individual’s career (and criminal record).

Taylor provides one feasible explanation as to why MSWs (and gay men in general) may be the bearers of stigma:

As a society we fear ‘penetration’. It symbolises conquest, rape, plunder, infiltration, destruction of the race. A man’s role is to prevent penetration of his own community, his territory, his womenfolk. Whores who subject themselves to repeated penetration are therefore symbols of invasion and contamination and any man who takes another man’s penis into himself, who passively allows anal sex, who lets himself be pierced, lanced, shafted is a terrible threat to the established order. He is like a neuter, a non-person, which is why homosexual men become the targets for so much irrational hatred, persecution and oppression (1991: 98).

There is evidence to suggest that ‘whore stigma’ does not impact upon male sex workers as greatly as it does upon females – and that some may even gain in status from their engagement in sex work (Goodley 1994; Jeffreys 1997; Koken, Bimbi & Parsons 2010; Zuilhof 1999), and be ‘exalted’ by others in the gay community for their ability to capitalise on their natural attractiveness (as noted by Seth). However, this does not mean MSWs are unscathed by the fear and experience of stigma, or necessarily feel comfortable disclosing details of their work. Participants in Morrison and Whitehead’s (2007) study considered gay men to be just as discriminatory towards MSWs, if not more so, than the heterosexual population.

Gilbert (1996) considers MSWs to be the bearers of a ‘triple stigma’, due to the conflation of prostitution, homosexuality and HIV/AIDS by society at large. Experiences of stigma vary depending on the extent to which individuals internalise a ‘spoiled identity’ such as that of the ‘prostitute’ (Goffman 1963). Many participants in this study demonstrated a strong anxiety with regards to friends and family discovering their involvement in sex work, indicating that this anxiety is motivated by a fear of social perceptions, in addition to potential negative impacts upon a future career.
Due to their fear of being stigmatised, several members of the research sample, including Jack, Lachlan, and Brian, each mentioned that the opportunity presented by their interviews to disclose personal details of their feelings towards sex work was a luxury that had rarely, if ever, been afforded to them previously. Only a steadfast guarantee of anonymity and confidentiality secured access to certain members of this population for research purposes. Jack, for example, had never spoken to another individual about his work. This indicates the deep feelings of shame and stigma some workers feel towards their involvement in sex work.

Despite sex work being progressively normalised, sexualised, and valourised in gay social life, MSWs are likely to experience stigma from other gay men. Tom spoke of making a ‘mistake’ early in his sex working career in revealing details of his sex work to acquaintances. Many reacted negatively, drawing upon stereotypes of a drug addicted street worker. Adam also considered many gay men to harbour negative perceptions of sex workers, concluding that ‘they’re all bitches’. This attitude resulted from stigma he received from his partner’s friends for being a ‘hooker’. For Anthony, telling other gay men the truth about his occupation when out on the ‘scene’ elicits a polarised response. Some men find his involvement in sex work arousing, while many others find it unappealing. These reactions capture the paradoxical tension between the sexualisation and stigmatisation of sex work in the gay milieu.

A handful of participants, such as Neil and Santos, adopted dismissive attitudes towards the perceptions of others. Santos considers homosexuality to be so stigmatised that he is already liable to condemnation, and reasoned that his involvement in sex work is unlikely to provoke further experience of stigma. Adam, while prone to feeling stigmatised, can see the importance of ‘holding his head high’:

   It’s such a taboo subject, and it’s not shined upon nicely (sic), and I am a strong enough person to go, ‘well, you’re all idiots, really’. Everyone deserves to be treated with the same amount of love and respect. You know there’s so much hate in the world, and discrimination, and stuff like that, so I’m proud of myself to a degree that I can hold my head high and say, ‘well, I don’t care about what you think of this, it’s my life’ (Adam).

Perhaps in an attempt to offset stigma, a group of participants, including Jared, Kent, and Steve, attempt to project a sense of glamour when discussing their work, citing the opportunity to fraternise with affluent regulars – a scenario far more likely in this medium of sex work than others (as discussed earlier in this thesis). However, despite access to clients who can shower them with expensive gifts and overseas trips, for some workers, what is really being sold (rather than access to their bodies) is their sense of self-respect.
When I was younger I used to look at escorts online and think ‘wow, how impressive’ or whatever, but now I do it, I don’t. It’s the guys that really like themselves that go and get themselves good careers, make good money, feel really good about themselves, and live lifestyles that are completely within the idea that they are important and respect themselves that I admire, and I don’t think that if you’re a sex worker that you really, completely respect yourself. Not completely. I do like myself a lot better than I did before, but I think if I really, really liked myself then I wouldn’t do this work (Seth).

It’s more at the time [of jobs] that coping with [stigma] is an issue, like when I first started doing it, the first client I ever saw, I cried and cried and cried, driving, the whole way home – like ‘I can’t believe my life has come to this’ (Jack).

Even those participants who are comfortable with their involvement in sex work are seldom truly open about it, with the exception of Steve, Kent and Anthony. These three participants did, however, report feeling compelled to concoct an alternative professional narrative in certain situations (such as weddings and family reunions), although they claimed this was to avoid external prejudice rather than feelings of shame. However, the distinction may not always be so clear when one’s family is concerned, and the complexities of disclosure and non-disclosure in a familial context are beyond the scope of this thesis. In this context, Morrison and Whitehead’s view that limits to disclosure are usually ‘grounded in the desire to protect others from vicariously experiencing the stigma of sex work’ (2007: 214) holds true. These men are genuinely concerned that public knowledge of their profession would affect their families (even though the families themselves are well aware of their involvement).

6.7 Dissociative techniques

Sex workers may employ dissociative strategies to distance themselves from their work, and address any potential psychological impact (or ‘mind-fuck’ as described by Jared) that engaging in sexual relations with strangers may present. Sanders (2005) highlights four ways that female sex workers ‘emotion manage’ in their professional lives. These include: creating bodily exclusion zones (i.e. an unwillingness to perform certain acts with clients such as kissing, or to allow areas of their bodies to be touched), ensuring condoms are used, and the provision of domination services only (i.e. allowing the client to have no direct sexual contact with them). ‘Emotion management’ is also achieved through the meanings women attach to sex work – for 78 Evidenced in part by the use of their real names when working.
example, engaging in sex as ‘work’ free of any notion of intimacy, and maintaining a separate identity who engages in this activity.

While past researchers have reported MSWs using condoms to establish a ‘barrier’ that is not used in personal sexual encounters (e.g. Minichiello et al. 2000), many of the IMSWs interviewed for this study reported consistent condom usage. Participants attribute this to the fear of contracting HIV/STIs, rather than any explicit need to create an emotional barrier. The provision of domination services did not feature in the research sample, indicating that while engagement with such services does occur, it is negotiated in the same way as other fetish services (i.e. on a discreet, one to one basis). No workers advertising solely as a provider of domination services was located at any stage of this study. This indicates that domination services provided by women for men enjoy considerably more demand than those of men for men, although two members of the sample (Steve, Jared) did express their interest in specialising in ‘bondage and discipline’ in the future. While these two aspects (relating to condoms and domination services) of Sanders’ investigation were not corroborated by experiences within this study’s sample, both bodily exclusion zones and the employment of constructed meanings attached to sex work (serving as emotion management strategies, or what this study terms dissociative techniques), were consistently reported throughout the interview process.

Bodily exclusion zones were created by some members of the sample. The most common ‘exclusion’ noted by participants was their unwillingness to engage in receptive anal intercourse. The general sentiment of workers seeking to keep aspects of their sex life ‘private’, or reserved for casual partners or a lover, is captured in Lachlan’s words below.

It’s not a particularly glamorous thing to do, and I don’t do things with my clients that other people do, like I don’t kiss them and hardly ever go down on them, I don’t often bottom for them either. I’m more of a top. There are things that I set aside for myself for my own private life, and things that they can have. I always make it very clear when they contact me exactly what I do, because I don’t want to mislead people and there’s a certain part of myself I can’t give people, I don’t want it for sale. I try to keep myself a little bit separate from this field (Lachlan).

Other participants believe that offering ‘everything’ is what separates their ‘sex worker’ identity from their true self. In other words, the ‘sex worker’ segment of their personality is willing to engage in sexual activity that the ‘true person’ is not.
Sometimes people [ask over the phone] ‘what do you like, what are you into?’ And I’m like, [rolls eyes] ‘I’m a sex worker. I get into what you get into. I like what you like’ (Seth).

I think it’s easier to be with these guys [and do anything sexually] because I don’t care about them… because they mean less than nothing, you know, whereas if you go out and pick up a hot guy, that could be intimidating. I know it sounds weird, but [that’s the way I think] (Barry).

As highlighted by Sanders (2005), the meanings that each individual attaches to their sex working experience can be instrumental to their wellbeing. Similar to the women in Sanders’ study, the dissociative technique of constructing of sex work as a legitimate form of employment was common in this study’s research sample, firmly categorising their experience within the ‘sex as work’ paradigm. Though the practice of constructing sex work as ‘work’ in order to achieve distance from it seems contradictory at first glance, it is based on the premise that work is not something to be enjoyed. To enjoy sex work, or see it as merely a ‘side project’, would be to concede that the worker may engage in sexual relations with members of their client base outside of a commercial context. By focusing on the financial compensation received, participants accepted that they were required to have sex with unappealing men on a regular basis, who mean ‘less than nothing’ to them.

This sounds really selfish, but I don’t really care about them. To me, they’re a number. To me they’re money. That’s all they are … I would never meet them in real life (Jack).

If I wasn’t getting paid the amount of money that I’m getting paid I wouldn’t be doing it. It’s not something – having sex with someone who is completely not attractive to me, it’s not something I enjoy, but you know, [I] just do it (Brian).

Participants who employ this dissociative technique were the most reluctant to report experiences where they were aroused during sex with a client, appreciated the client’s company, or otherwise enjoyed the experience. When prompted, such experiences were shared, although the workers stressed that these were the minority of encounters experienced during their working lives.

Refusing to construct sex as work can also represent a conscious attempt to dissociate from the activity. Lachlan is unwilling to register himself as a sex worker and avoids adopting any marketing strategies, let alone a professional sex working identity.
This profession is ludicrous enough as it is without having to register yourself. It’s not even a job; I don’t consider it as a job.

[Why not?]

Because it’s sexual favours for money, it’s not a job; it’s like a thing you do for extra money. But I don’t know, maybe some people do it full time, I’m sure some people do (Lachlan).

Other participants (such as Tyrone, Jared, Anthony, Tom, Matt and Adam) all construct sex as work, but do so in a manner that emphasises the benefits of handsome remuneration, alongside developing friendships and taking pleasure in the ability to provide a sensual and pleasurable ‘service’ for another man. Miles, Neil and Tom consider many of their clients to be attractive men whom they would sleep with socially, leading the workers to take pleasure and pride (and boosts to their self esteem) from their work. This attitude was summarised by Tom:

Sex work has always been really interesting to me. It combines something that I absolutely love doing, with making money. I love multiple aspects of sex work, sex is [something that] I would consider to be a small part of the work, for the one hour or two hours that we spend together – there’s a lot more that comes before and after that. Meeting people is a huge thing as well, from all different walks of life; you get to learn a lot about people when you meet them (Tom).

While the outlook exemplified by these participants appears conducive to living positively and retaining a healthy mental state, other workers, such as Jack, refuse to believe that some individuals find sex work enjoyable. Jack relayed the story of an occasion when he was contacted by another escort, under the impression that the two might establish a friendship. Jack assumed that this friendship would be based upon a mutual dislike of sex work, whereby the two men might counsel one another through difficult work-related issues. However, when they met for the first time, Jack discovered that his new ‘friend’ did not loathe his involvement in sex work, but instead quite enjoyed it. Jack subsequently dismissed him as a ‘sleaze’.

He told me that he basically loves what he does, [and he] really enjoys it, because you meet great clients, make great money and you have great sex. And I was like –‘are you for real? You’ve got to be joking, you enjoy it?’ I was blown away [and I asked him to leave] (Jack).

In this anecdote, Jack aligns himself with the attitudes he perceives are held by ‘normal’ people (i.e. non-stigmatised individuals), and displays ‘ambivalence [towards] his own kind’ in the manner suggested by Goffman (1963: 130).

79 This outlook mirrors the contented ‘Liberationists’ in Dorais’ study (2005) who experience sex work as an enjoyable and lucrative means of self-expression.
6.8 Psychosexual issues

Irrespective of participants’ outlooks on their involvement in the sex industry, one psychosexual issue was common across the whole sample. This was the negative effect of sex work upon an individual’s private (i.e. non-commercial) sex life. The issue was not universally reported. Matt, Kent and Tom noted that some esoteric sexual practices (toys/dildos, fisting and golden showers\(^80\)) requested by clients had come to be something they enjoyed with casual (i.e. non-commercial) partners. However, the routine aspect of sex in the professional setting frequently affects workers’ personal lives. Many interviewees were disinterested in pursuing a relationship while sex working, for several reasons. Jack expressed his wish to not ‘put someone else through that’. Brain and Matheus felt their sex work would contravene ideals of monogamy in their relationships. Matheus further suggested that his psychosexual development had been spoiled as a result of clients continually ‘projecting’ their fantasies onto him.

I don’t think I could be with someone and do that. It’s not me, I couldn’t do it. I wouldn’t be with anyone, knowing they were doing it. Like if my partner told me he was escorting, and how do I feel about still being with him, I couldn’t be with him [it’s just not right] (Brian).

You feel lonely in this sort of reality that you’ve built up for yourself... it’s been extremely difficult in my life to build up a significant relationship with anyone, because I [feel like I have to lie] and the moment I would be honest, there could be lots of problems. On top of that, the more men that project on to you what they want you to do, the more fantasies you nurture in your mind and it can become very painful... the past ten years of my profession, and even now I wonder, how could I have pulled this off for so long? Because I’m personally quite tired, and sometimes I feel that I’ve been living more than one life - that I’ve been living probably twelve lives in one lifetime (Matheus).

Seth and Karl continue to date men, although both admit casual sex no longer brings them any real joy. Like Matheus, Karl spoke of being exhausted, indicating that ‘burnout’ is a genuine issue for sex workers, much like it is for workers in other human-centered professions (e.g. social work, nursing).

I’ve had a lot of sex, and I kind of feel like I’m – everyone else seems to be a little bit ahead of me, like whenever I have sex, like it takes me more time to get into it, it’s so normal that it’s almost like making a cup of tea, which is not what sex is supposed to be like... I think maybe I’m going to be desensitised towards sex, in the long-term, I don’t know (Seth).

\(^80\) A golden shower refers to urination in sex play.
It just takes the gloss off [personal sex] when you’re doing [sex work]. You know it becomes just like a routine [and in personal sexual relations] you become disconnected; it becomes robotic. It devalues the value of sex… I just think it’s draining; you get tired after a couple of years. You need [to take] a break for a while and try something different. Because it takes a lot of energy to get there and put on an act and make someone feel sexy. And I think it does affect you spiritually, emotionally, and that sort of stuff so you kind of need to put your energy back in (Karl).

These sentiments are not unique to these two workers. The devaluation of intimacy and lackluster relationships with non-commercial sex partners has been evidenced in past research with female sex workers (Rowe 2011a; Taylor 1991) as well as with MSWs (Dorais 2005; Perkins & Bennett 1985; West & de Villiers 1992). This is an issue inherent in sex work that cannot be circumvented by technology, and one that necessitates a stronger engagement with service providers (e.g. Victorian AIDS Council, RhED) and associated professionals (e.g. counsellors) so that workers may obtain help in curbing the negative effects on their private sex lives. It may be, however, that desensitisation to casual or private sex is simply an inevitable consequence of sex work.

Another factor endangering the psychosexual wellbeing of workers was visible in the research sample. The pressure to conform to idealised perspectives of male physicality, amplified by the Internet’s focus on images and photography, creates a sense of inadequacy experienced not only by workers who feel that they don’t fit the mold, but also those who do. Many participants reported regular visits to the gym in order to build and maintain a physique in line with client expectations. Several relayed feelings of inadequacy associated with this commoditisation of their bodies (Miles, Tyrone, John), particularly with regards to their ability to obtain or maintain an erection (Jack, Adam). Santos and Kent both asserted that a gym-fit body and invariable penis function are inextricably tied to being a successful and dutiful sex worker (over and above other skills that may be required).

This section has covered the range of perspectives, both positive and negative, that inform IMSWs’ construction of potential work hazards. Unfortunately, the significant advantages achieved by working over the Internet cannot solve or lessen the psychological challenges so entrenched in the realm of sex work, and most workers are not accessing any support available to them, as described below.
6.9 Lack of engagement with support services

Another important issue presented in interviews concerns the isolation of local IMSWs, due to a lack of engagement with support networks. Despite the psychological issues faced by IMSWs, many are reluctant to seek help. Most of the workers interviewed for this project enjoyed stable, middle class upbringings, free of perceived mental health problems. As a result, these men saw themselves as self-sufficient and well-equipped to deal with whatever threats to their mental health sex work might pose.

I'm a very together person, and I can rationalise everything in my mind. Mentally I'm together – pretty strong, capable and I can see an end to this. It's not like I'm doing it because I have nothing else to do (Lachlan).

Such assertions of self-sufficiency were expressed in interviews repeatedly, even by certain participants who simultaneously reported feeling trapped, isolated and stigmatised by sex work. Such participants could potentially benefit from interaction with aforementioned service providers and counseling. As noted, primarily due to fears of being stigmatised, several participants had never disclosed details of their sex work to another person until their interview. While the interviews provided participants with a strictly non-judgmental environment in which to speak freely, they were not equipped to provide participants with long-term strategies for coping with the negative impacts of their work.

Isolation and disconnection from support networks (in the form of social services and fellow workers) leads many IMSWs to deal with threats to their wellbeing introspectively. Many participants likely belong to other forms of community and are therefore not entirely isolated. Yet the potential to associate with other workers on the basis of shared experiences would likely bring positive change to the lives of some participants, even if this suggestion largely met with derision. Some workers knew of RhED, although most were unaware of its existence and had been in contact with other workers to varying degrees. For the most part, however, the men interviewed were doubtful about making contact with support networks.

IMSWs are the most difficult population of sex workers for services to reach due to the nature of their working medium (i.e. they are physically inaccessible in contrast to those working in brothels or the known street sex circuit). In disregarding the services provided by RhED, some workers, such as Brian and Jack, are able to distance themselves from their work and the adoption of a sex worker ‘identity’. Both suggested that to interact with the service would be to announce to the world that they were sex workers.
This is kind of going to contradict with what I’m doing now [with the interview], but I don’t know, I just don’t want to get involved in all that... I know I’m doing it, and that sounds kind of silly to say, but the less involved in everything else around it I am, the better, the more comfortable I feel (Brian).

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I don’t really want them to know who I am, and get into that. When I spoke to them on the phone they said to come into their office, and I don’t really want to be seen walking in there (Jack).

Miles considers RhED to be irrelevant to his needs, and Seth was initially under the impression that ‘it was more for women, more for the street [workers]’. He relayed his recent experience of having been contacted by an outreach worker to discuss the recent ‘crackdown’ on sex workers’ online advertising. This signals that the organisation has been making a concerted effort to engage IMSWs and be relevant to their needs. Bailey shared Seth’s opinion that RhED is intended for street workers, and, while he had visited the organisation’s headquarters to pick up free condoms and lubricant, felt it unnecessary to engage with RhED staff. The only participants to ever engage with RhED to a significant degree were Karl and Tom, who consider it a valuable service that provides a rare opportunity to socialise with other workers, irrespective of their gender or working environment.

Support services can be relevant to safety concerns. Barry emailed RhED after seeing a poster for the ‘Ugly Mugs’ program during his brief employment at a brothel, and requested a form to report a client who had verbally abused him when he requested payment upfront. While face to face contact with staff (and less often, colleagues) at a service provider such as RhED may be an appealing (and indeed indispensable) service for a handful of workers, it was made clear throughout the interviews that most IMSWs do not deem such contact necessary, and that RhED is perceived to hold little value as a service. Information pertaining to sexual health, legislation, ‘trade tips’ and other aspects of the sex worker experience is abundant on the Internet. Thus, many workers (such as Anthony and Miles) consider themselves to be ‘self-sufficient’ and access such information of their own accord (although the inaccuracy of regulatory general knowledge suggests some workers are not doing so regarding legislative information). It is also worth considering the very different types of support that workers may seek (perhaps best exemplified in Jack’s experience of being sexualised when seeking support), and that these differences need to be considered by service providers. RhED once promoted their service to IMSWs through passive outreach, using a RhED profile listed on Rentboy containing information of the existence of the organisation and the availability of advice.
and support. As of November 2012, this profile had been removed (although it is unclear who was responsible for its removal).

6.10 Lack of engagement with other workers

Despite the existence of organisations such as the Victorian AIDS Council/Gay Men’s Health Centre (VAC/GMHC) and RhED, and the national sex worker organisation Scarlet Alliance, many IMSWs in Melbourne fail to access the formal, professional support networks available to them. They also appear to avoid developing informal, casual relationships (i.e. friendships) with other workers, further compounding a sense of disconnection from any form of sex worker ‘community’ among men in this population. Although recent research has found social ties to be strong among male street workers (Davies & Feldman 1999; Leary & Minichiello 2007) and brothel workers (Smith, Grov & Seal 2008), little is known about the interpersonal relations between IMSWs.

Prior to the rise of the Internet, de Graaf et al. (1994) found that the (print-based) private escorts engaged in their study made little to no contact with other workers, resulting in the absence of social support networks. The context has changed dramatically in the two decades since de Graaf’s study, and contact with other workers is now possible with an impersonal click of a button, rather than a worker needing to pick up the telephone and build a conversation and rapport on a personal level with another worker. Participants in this study expressed varying degrees of interest in contacting and networking with their ‘colleagues’. The desire of those who liked the idea of making online contact with others was usually related to the prospect of carrying out ‘doubles’81 with other workers and ‘sharing’ workloads, although story swapping and the informal sharing of advice would also occur.

I met one of them in person. The rest are just online chit chat kind of… we’ve shared heaps of stories. One of them I’ve actually done threesome work with before (Brian).

They [other workers] are pretty good if you want advice and that sort of stuff. But I’m not really into it anymore, so I used to have a lot more friends that were workers when I was younger. You can kind of form a bond pretty quickly with someone, if you just contact them. And sometimes people contact me for advice; [when] they want to get into [sex work for example]… I always give them help, I get a lot of young guys that are you know,

81 ‘Doubles’ refers to a client hiring the services of two workers concurrently.
messaging me and they’re really curious and I end up chatting to them online for ages (Karl).

Not all participants are receptive of online contact. Joseph admitted to feeling like a ‘snob’, preferring to ignore the gestures made by other workers seeking to initiate contact. Some workers, including Kent and Tom, contact one another to engage in casual sex – one of the perceived benefits of membership in a group of (often) handsome, young, and sexually uninhibited men for whom sexual exploration and education is required for industry success.

A lot of the time if I’m having a night off, and just going to party and I want to go out and fuck, I’ll look and see who’s online, to see what workers are online and I’ll proposition [them] (Kent).

Bailey spoke of sharing information about clients with other workers in an effort to establish an informal database whereby problem clients may be avoided. This included violent clients to whom, although they did not report encountering such people themselves, participants did often allude.

It’s good to always have contacts within the industry, because if you have trouble with a client you can feed off someone else and find out if they did it to them as well... So it’s always good to be in the know when it comes to clients, for bookings and stuff because of STIs that I’ve spotted and some people [potentially] getting violent as well (Bailey).

A sense of competition and apathy were the primary motivations for participants’ unwillingness to engage with other workers. While interviewees occasionally reported an ability to make friends with other workers on the basis of shared experience, Raymond and Matt expressed the difficulty they experience forming bonds with fellow workers.

I generally find it hard to talk to other escorts, especially on Gaydar, they don’t communicate. I live with a couple that have done it before, and are still doing it, so we often communicate about different clients, what to do, what not to do, but generally online, it’s quite hard to communicate to them, because they don’t reply (Raymond).

Some of the escorts that I’ve met, and done work with, like doubles and stuff, some of them have been nice, genuine people, and I wouldn’t say we’re friends or [have] maintained that much contact, but they’re the ones that I would go to when someone had enquired about a double. Because there are other people where I’ve been sharing a cab with them [after the job] and trying to have a conversation or something and they are very fake. It feels like they’re sitting there going ‘no, you’re competition, I’m not giving away any of my secrets’ (Matt).
Miles spoke of the reticence he holds in regards to contacting other workers. Not only does he already have a partner with whom he can perform doubles, but he also considers the industry competitive, and prefers not to engage directly with the competition.

I wouldn’t use the word community at all, in terms of contact. I mean online it’s quite competitive, which I find funny and don’t overly buy into, but I do at the same time... it is competitive, like who’s gonna be on top. But I don’t need to [contact other workers], and it’s not out of any snobby [reason], like [I’m] not interested or whatever, it’s just that there’s been no reason to (Miles).

Rather than avoiding other workers for competitive reasons, Steve regards his fellow workers with mistrust and suspicion.

I’ve met other rent boys out there that have a bad reputation. I try not to associate with other workers. Because it doesn’t help with my business. I’ve had stuff ups, I’ve had things gone wrong, ‘cause I’ve organised threesomes and -

[What happens? You get stood up or something?]

Nah, it’s not that, I just don’t like anyone else to associate with my business.

[So is it you just feel like you don’t need anyone else’s support?]

Yeah, that’s it. That website [Rentboy] is designed for private escorts, escorts who want to go off on their own, and do their own thing. And that’s what they do (Steve).

Kent relayed the story of a Melbourne-based IMSW who purposefully sabotaged a visiting escort’s chances of success by exaggerating the strictness of the legislative ‘crackdown’ and giving the visitor the impression that he would be arrested if he was found soliciting sex in Melbourne (in an effort to eradicate any potential threat of competition). Aside from the few who meet for sex, the atmosphere between workers in Melbourne appears hostile. Neil describes the needlessness of this behaviour in his reflection below:

I just think, fuck man, we should be tight – if anything, we should be tight – I mean we’re the ones who know better than anyone else what we face, we’re the ones that if you’re going into a sticky situation, you can either call the police and have to explain yourself to that, or you could potentially call on three or four buddy escorts and they could come to the hotel and get you the fuck out of there. I mean I know which one I’d fuckin’ rather do. But it just seems to be really catty, and competitive, and again, why should it be competitive? There’s not two men that are the same [so there’s plenty of clients for everyone] (Neil).

While support groups for female (and transgender) sex workers exist locally, such as Fun in Australia (Rowe 2011a), and for workers of all genders (e.g. monthly ‘Vixen’ meetings), many
workers are either unaware of their existence or do not attend. When informed of the activities of these groups in interviews, participants appeared disinterested in socialising with other IMSWs, although a handful did express interest in participating in social groups in order to combat the population’s segregation.

I’m also thinking maybe it would be nice to have that kind of support, and to talk to some other escorts about their experiences, and the way they’ve dealt with certain things (Barry).

I’m quite comfortable being a worker, and I’m more than happy to meet other workers in a group environment, once a month, or once every six months. But there are lots of guys who aren’t comfortable with that, and they don’t want to go near RhED in case they get seen going in there or whatever, so sometimes I’ll offer like a support role, like Christian [Vega] does to me (Tom).

As described by Smith and colleagues (2008), brothel and street workers enjoy the advantage of a camaraderie that helps to allay their sense of isolation, particularly when encumbered with a stigma that sees them pushed to society’s margins. While these issues of ‘community’ fragmentation are not unique to Internet-based workers and also apply to those involved in print media, the element of competition exacerbated by the ability of workers to view and critique the profiles of other workers is unique to this medium. In other words, the possession of readily accessible information about their peers online leads some IMSWs to engage in dissociative and judgemental thinking.

6.11 Addicted to a lifestyle: drug use and monetary dependence in sex work

As mentioned in Chapter Two, this research is eager to avoid invoking past frameworks that focus heavily on problematic drug use among MSWs. The reality is that several workers interviewed were using drugs and all had been exposed to drug use at some stage of their sex work careers. Previous research has shown that drugs and/or alcohol are used in nearly half of all MSW encounters (Minichiello et al. 2003). Drug use can allow the personal boundaries set by a worker to break down (Brewis & Linstead 2000), and is often associated with engagement in high-risk (i.e. unprotected) sexual practices (Timpson et al. 2007). Morse et al. (1992) argue that drug use helps MSWs to cope with psychological hazards, such as the stress and negativity that can arise from extended periods of engaging in repetitive sex acts with strangers. According to
the researchers, male (and female) sex workers ‘self-medicate’ with illicit drugs in order to manage role conflict, internal conflicts, and a loss of self-esteem. This statement neglects to consider those workers who do not suffer low self-esteem, nor role or internal conflicts (i.e. those who enjoy their work), yet use drugs recreationally (although in some cases this can lead to problematic usage). However, it is important to consider the temptation to self-medicate in an environment where isolation and low self-esteem are found. While IMSWs experience demonstrably lower rates of drug abuse than street workers (Rowe 2011a) and enjoy higher rates of self-esteem, financial success, confidence and feelings of social connectedness (Uy et al. 2004), many external factors may be involved in an individual’s decision to engage in recreational drug use either during encounters with clients or to relax after working.

The inflated accessibility of illicit drugs in the sex industry has been well documented. Many participants reported having been offered complimentary drugs on a regular basis during encounters with clients. Workers in the online medium are more likely to be offered drugs than brothel workers, whose management (in accordance with the Sex Work Act) typically enforce a zero-tolerance policy towards the possession and use of drugs on (and even off) premises. Participants’ reported use of drugs in commercial sexual encounters varied. Some workers, such as Jared and Raymond, felt pressured by clients to use drugs, and would often have to inform their client sternly that they were not interested. Others, such as Bailey and Jake, asserted that they didn’t use drugs either on the job or recreationally. In an act of dissociation and stratification, Bailey remarked: ‘I don’t blow my money on drugs like some of the other guys do’.

Cocaine and ‘ice’ (crystal methamphetamine) are, according to participants, the most popular drugs in the IMSW client base in Melbourne. These two were mentioned repeatedly, but little else. Heroin does not appear to feature at all in the world of IMSWs and their clients, quite unlike its role as a cornerstone of the street-based sex trade in Melbourne (e.g. Rowe 2006; 2011a).

Adam considers the availability of drugs in the sex industry a danger to his wellbeing (and his only reported concern). At the time of his interview, Adam had only recently commenced his work in the industry.

The only thing I’ve really had problems with, and that people have warned me about, is the amount of drugs that are accessible in escorting. And I don’t have a huge amount of self-control, and I have a history of drug use. So that’s been really full on, to have just drugs [available], all the time (Adam).
Adam stated that ‘drug use and availability is a problem not just for gay escorts, but for all escorts’. While Adam is generalising, many (indoor) sex workers choose to avoid drug use, even in a recreational context. Jared’s statement below implies that drug aversion could be considered an additional strategy for success in the industry (in addition to those discussed in the previous chapter).

I don’t do drugs, I always say no. I’ll drink, I love to drink and I’ll say ‘I’ll get off my face drinking with you’, but I can’t take drugs’. And I’ll give them any excuse – I’m allergic to it, I’ve had bad experiences, a friend overdosed, I tell them stories to put them off pressuring me to do it… it’s just not worth the risk to fuck myself up [in the long term] (Jared).

While none of the participants in this study were engaged in problematic drug use at the time of their interviews, many shared stories of acquaintances that had been ‘screwed up’ by drug use and turned to sex work to fund their habits.

If your head’s not in a good space then it’s best to not work. Because it can screw people up, especially if they have drug problems… you’d see guys who are out a lot, and then you kind of see them hanging around with certain people and getting a lot thinner. Because I used to work in one of the sex clubs in Sydney… suddenly they’d have an ad on Rentboy or Gaydar, and they’d be getting thinner and thinner (Anthony).

Participants reported another addiction separate to issues of drug use. Many had become psychologically dependent on the large amount of money they earned from sex working (bearing in mind that such earnings are even more considerable in the absence of paying tax). While this is not a new phenomenon (Rowe 2011a; Uy et al. 2004; West & de Villiers 1992), it is seldom acknowledged as a detrimental aspect of sex work. For those that plan to exit the industry, the allure of the ‘easy money’, and also the attention received from clients (as was the case with Raymond), can pose a significant barrier to departure.

I only want to do it for another six months, that’s the plan… a lot of people have said to me, ‘you’ll never be able to get over it, you’ll never be able to leave it’ because you get addicted to the lifestyle and you get addicted to the money, the easy money. I tried to quit a year ago, when I went to Europe but I came back and I was desperate for money and I got back into it. So I think there might be an element of that forever in my life. But I do really want to get away from it (Bailey).

The down side is that it’s going to be hard to do something else with my life, because the money isn’t going to be anywhere near as good, and I’m not going to have as much free time. It’s very addictive, very addictive for me. My friend said to me when he worked out
what I was doing, he said ‘there’ll be a price to pay, and it will be financial’… so I think I need a career move where I make really easy money, I’m sure that’s realistic [laughs] (Seth).

At the time of their interviews in early 2011, Seth, Jack, Matheus and Karl each spoke of their plans to exit the industry within the next few months (due to the desire to pursue a more respected career, a loss of self-esteem, exhaustion and ageing, respectively). As of November 2012, each worker was still advertising, indicating their entrenchment in the industry despite strong motivations to leave. Assistance for workers in such a position could take the form of information disseminated by RhED as to how individuals wishing to exit the industry may find employment that matches their skill set, and will remunerate the individual at a rate that doesn’t leave them longing to return to sex work. In addition, many workers spoke of the inconsistency of their earnings, ranging from several thousand dollars per week to only a couple of hundred dollars (or nothing at all). More information might be provided by RhED that aims to assist sex workers to better manage their finances, a problem not unique to IMSWs in Melbourne (with many participants in Parsons, Koken and Bimbi’s 2007 study also concerned by such issues). Finally, drawing on the experiences of Barry and Jared below, it may be valuable for RhED to encourage ‘full-time’ or ‘career’ sex workers to study while sex working, in order to equip themselves with a skill set for the inevitable day when they are unable to continue working.

I know that I can’t do this forever and I’m sort of getting to the point where I know that this isn’t what I want to do…. But I’m at that point now where all my friends are doing their dream jobs, like they’ve studied, and come out of it – and doing what they want to do, and I was just not like that (Barry)

I think if you make it a career choice you should have some other form of income, because then you become really angry at the world, in a way, like ‘I don’t want to do this tonight, but I have to, because I’ve got to make rent or pay this phone bill’. And that’s when you start getting people who you lower your price [for] because you need to… because you’re desperate for the money. And I’ve done it… but I think you need a day job; just relying on it can ruin your [life]. I also think you need to be very level-headed and have a plan, don’t just sit back and think, ‘oh, I’ll just keep living off doing this for the rest of your life’, because you will get older, and I’m fast approaching 30. And you know, you can’t do it… I have one escort friend who’s been doing it since he was very, very young, he never had a proper job, rented really nice apartments… he got prostate cancer, had to take time off work because he was quite unwell, he’s all ok now, but he can’t get erections anymore, so he can’t work. And he has no income, no savings, and I have no idea where he’s disappeared to… and I don’t want to become someone like that, who has no career or study to fall back on. It shouldn’t be your whole life (Jared).
6.12: Conclusions

This chapter has outlined the issues currently affecting the operations and wellbeing of IMSWs at an individual and collective level. The discussion has examined the impact of recent legislative changes, which are shown to be adversely affecting workers in differing ways. Such ways include the fostering of an apathetic attitude towards the legislation in general, the creation of anxiety about possible apprehension, and the restriction of workers’ earning capacities.

The safety of workers during encounters has been discussed, with little evidence found to identify physical violence as a significant risk for workers – although the experience of verbal abuse is a reality for many participants. A range of threats to the mental health and wellbeing of workers have been discussed, with workers found to employ dissociative strategies in order to cope with the psychological demands of their work. To compound this psychological hazard, few workers actively seek support from the appropriate channels (e.g. RhED, fellow workers), resulting in the fragmentation and isolation of the IMSW population, and leaving many workers vulnerable to drug use and entrenchment in the industry.

To summarise, this chapter posits that, despite the normalisation of sex work that has occurred, and the hitherto unattainable advantages offered by the Internet, dangers exist for IMSWs that are either inherent in sex work or brought about by this new paradigm, which service providers, legislative bodies, and workers themselves need to address.
Conclusions and Recommendations

This thesis represents an exploration of the Internet-based male sex industry as it operates in Melbourne in the second decade of the 21st century. The study posed the following questions:

- How and why has the Internet arisen as the dominant medium for men selling sex in Melbourne?
- How do MSWs in Melbourne use the Internet to advertise and to secure clients, and how receptive is their client base to such strategies?
- What does it mean to be successful in the online industry? What approaches are taken by MSWs in developing sound business acumen?
- What issues and concerns exist among MSWs in Melbourne operating via the Internet? What are the consequences associated with working via this medium?

Semi-structured interviews with (primarily) Internet-based male sex workers have shown that the traditional structure of the male sex industry has been transformed by the Internet. A range of unprecedented industrial benefits and strategies for success can be observed among IMSWs, alongside some undesirable consequences.

To address the first research question, interview data and local sources facilitated an analysis of each key traditional site in male sex work (street, brothel, agency and print-media based work), and highlighted the perceived drawbacks of each medium that have contributed to an increase in the number of Melbourne-based men selling sexual services online. The rise in the Internet’s popularity was explained, with participants’ interview data highlighting the compelling advantages of this particular medium, including convenience, autonomy, safety, and improved economic returns. The rationale for clients’ usage of the Internet was discussed, as were traditional and emerging client demographics, demonstrating that the Internet is an appealing marketplace for the clients of MSWs. This section of the thesis provided an impetus for the study’s focus on IMSW, while creating a useful ‘snapshot’ of the Melbourne-based male sex industry and the individuals and populations involved.

The second question necessitated an investigation into the ways MSWs market themselves online and the mechanics of securing encounters through the Internet for both workers and their clients. The processes involved in workers’ advertising received detailed discussion, tracing the process from the IMSW’s investigation of fellow workers’ advertisements and design of a
personal brand, through to the adoption of varied marketing strategies. Several of these strategies employed by IMSWs were identified, including tendencies to identify niche markets, set consistent prices and respond to client feedback. Four key stereotypes were found to influence workers’ online personas: the ‘hyper masculine’, the ‘exotic’, the ‘the poor uni student’ and the ‘boy next door’. Although such processes can demand significant effort, this study revealed that clients often pay scant attention to the resulting complex detail made possible by the Internet. Instead, clients were found to restrict their attention to superficial advertising images. On the other hand, clients were more inclined to proactively engage with the worker’s advertising when seeking niche services. Additionally, the study found that communication between MSWs and their clients is becoming increasingly digitalised.

In response to the third question, this thesis explored workers’ perceptions of success in the male sex industry and the various ‘offline’ strategies employed to secure and maintain a client base. Workers use a range of tactics to achieve success in the industry, many of which stem from the active construction of sex work as a business. The study found that the use of clothing and props, and the abilities to refrain from ‘clockwatching’ and build relationships with clients (while setting personal boundaries) are perceived as useful strategies by many IMSWs. The study also demonstrated that workers who are high self-monitors (i.e. they are more able to adapt to the demands of their clients) consider themselves more successful in maintaining a large client base. Finally, a case study of Jared, a highly successful worker, suggested that the benefits of being a ‘kept boy’ are evident, yet insecure.

To address the final question, this study drew attention to the less desirable aspects of the male sex worker experience in the online trade. The investigation revealed that the current legislative context can adversely affect workers’ freedom in relation to their advertising, create anxiety around law enforcement and privacy, and restrict earning potential. These complications serve as additional stress factors in an industry where many are reluctant to seek assistance. Sex workers’ accounts suggested that the risk of physical violence is not as significant for men involved in Internet based sex work as it is for women; however verbal abuse is a daily reality. Psychological impacts of the work were discussed, with many workers experiencing the effects of stigma alongside negative impacts upon their sex life. Dissociative strategies allow workers to cope with these psychological demands. The inflated availability of drugs in the industry poses another risk factor for IMSWs, alongside the possibility of long-term entrenchment in the industry. While working online affords workers a prized sense of autonomy, the resulting
disconnection from other workers and established support services (e.g. RhED) is a key consequence.

This thesis contributes to the social science literature on male sex work in several significant ways. To my knowledge, this study stands as the first in-depth, qualitative exploration of online male sex work in Australia, and one of few worldwide. By detailing who is working, where and why, it provides a clear demarcation of the industry. It broadens the understanding of a vast milieu that has been documented only in part by previous researchers, and one that may be compared to current and emerging online male sex work markets in neighboring jurisdictions.

The study challenges several obsolete and stigmatising paradigms within MSW research by reinforcing elements of more recent frameworks – namely research that examines the Internet as a working tool for sex workers, and uses qualitative methodologies in understanding the more personal aspects of MSWs’ experiences in the industry. The thesis demonstrates that the Internet is more than a peripheral tool sex workers use to conduct their business. Rather, it encompasses a range of benefits for the modern MSW, along with a range of legislative and psychosocial complications, while providing an arena for the exploration of intersecting notions of masculinity, sexuality, identity and work.

The thesis has synthesised established research, alongside new interview data, to draw attention to the prevalence of MSW in both a formal and informal capacity. It opens the door for further investigation of the true extent of this phenomenon. Given the scope and normalisation of MSW, it is of concern that so few organisations choose to engage with the surrounding issues.

An analysis of this altered industry is a step towards appreciating the consequences of online innovation, both positive and negative, for the male (and female and transgender) sex workers involved. Issues and needs unique to individuals working online have become apparent, and it is hoped that this research can assist sex worker advocacy and support services in tailoring appropriate responses.

Suggestions are provided here for organisations considered in this study, made in response to the issues highlighted by the study’s participants. It would be valuable for RhED to repost a profile on both Rentboy and Gaydar, with a greater emphasis on offering counselling services and support for (I)MSWs. This may enhance their online presence and counteract widely held assumptions that the service is essentially for female street-based workers.
There is a need for workers to clarify their understanding of the legislation, while staff at both the Business Licensing Authority and Consumer Affairs Victoria must aim to provide clear responses to (potential) workers’ enquiries. The BLA and CAV might invest more resources in staff training and liaising with websites in order to reduce the confusion that results in a low rate of compliance with sections of the Sex Work Act. Workers should be assured of their privacy at all stages of contact to reduce the fear associated with having their details on record.

The Victorian AIDS Council/Gay Men’s Health Centre has the capacity to invest more resources in targeting (Internet-based) male sex workers with safe sex messages, and to promote the organisation’s capacity to provide counselling services to this population. Combined workshops/social groups between RhED and VAC/GMHC could be held to discuss issues unique to Internet-based male sex workers.

In light of recent amendments to sexual health testing regimes under the Sex Work Act, advocacy groups such as RhED and Scarlet Alliance ought to continue to lobby for the abolition of mandatory quarterly testing, in addition to more relaxed regulations around advertising (e.g. allowing for body shots, details of sexual services on offer). Finally, RhED might consider making the information in this thesis pertaining to online and offline strategies for success in the industry available as a resource for men starting out in the industry.

This study provides a detailed, yet narrow account of Internet-based male sex work and is located within a specific historical and geographical context. It is bound by certain limitations and it is important to detail these here. Although some limitations were mentioned in the second chapter, these referred to the nature of qualitative data itself. More broadly, while the voices of IMSWs are well represented throughout the study, those of other male sex workers are not. Key individuals within the industry - for example, current brothel/agency workers, heterosexual workers, and their clients - are noticeably absent. However, as highlighted, clients are a notoriously difficult group to recruit, brothel owners are often suspicious of researchers, and it was not for lack of trying that I was unable to source any ‘gigolos’.

This research also lacks a tool to collect detailed data, beyond the retrospective nature of an interview. A participant diary was tried unsuccessfully. Such a tool, with succinct questioning and greater incentives, may have provided deeper insights into the ways that a working persona is enacted during encounters. The conclusions drawn in Chapter Five may have been stronger if derived from a scale system or self-monitoring survey. It is possible that some participants engaged in self-monitoring throughout the interview, ‘inventing a story’ for the researcher in the
same way they would entertain clients (potentially impacting upon the legitimacy of their stories and backgrounds as described in the Appendix). It is also possible that the frequently taboo nature of their activities led some participants to withhold pertinent information regarding registration, drug use and sexual practices. Others may have withheld the true extent to which they were affected by their work, not wishing to expose their psychosexual vulnerabilities to a near stranger (despite the rapport developed during the research process).

Many issues presented throughout the study provide opportunities for further research. Researchers might investigate Melbourne-based male, female and transgender workers in more traditional sex work settings (including brothel and street-based work) to discover their current views of the industry and how the Internet has altered the scope of their profession. Additionally, a major study conducted in another capital city (e.g. Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide) would allow for a comparative study of IMSWs beyond the scope of this project and update the groundbreaking work carried out by Minichiello et al. in 1999/2000.

The experiences of heterosexual MSWs and their female clients also warrant attention, as would an investigation into the impact of stigma upon sex workers across varying genders and settings using psychometric tests. Further research is required to document the large population of men engaging in online sex work on an informal basis (i.e. without advertising or marketing themselves as a sex worker), and to consider the processes and outcomes associated with this practice. It is clear that the new technological paradigm continues to alter our understanding of the manner in which male-to-male commercial sex is negotiated – both on and offline.

To conclude, this thesis argues that the male sex industry has been impacted significantly by the advent of the Internet. New technology has created a range of perceived benefits for both workers and clients, and has allowed for the implementation of innovative marketing strategies; however some strategies for success are not directly attributable to the online medium, and are conceptualised in varying ways. Despite the benefits and opportunities the digital marketplace provides, a range of issues and complications have been found to affect the work and wellbeing of Internet-based male sex workers in Melbourne.
References


Cohen, S. 1973, Folk Devils and Moral Panics, Paladin, St Albans.


Kinsman, G. 1995, Regulation of Desire: Homo and Hetero Sexualities, Black Rose, Quebec.


Rowe, J. 2011(a), *SHANTUSI: Surveying HIV and Need in the Unregulated Sex Industry*, Inner South Community Health Service, Melbourne.

Rowe, J. 2011(b), *Living Next to Street Sex Work: A Narrative*, City of Port Phillip, Melbourne.


*Sex Work Act 1994* (Victoria)


Appendix
Participant demographics

The mean age of participants in this study (including street worker Jed) was 28.54 years, spanning the ages of 20-40 years old. The clear majority were of Caucasian/European descent \((n=20)\) although four were of Asian heritage, including three of Singaporean descent and one of Indian descent.

*Figure 1: Participants’ race*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian/European</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>83.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The vast majority of participants self-identified as gay or homosexual. Two self-identified as bisexual, although neither had engaged in sexual relations with women for some time. Street worker Jed was the sole participant to identify as heterosexual. Four participants were engaged in a long term homosexual relationship, two in which their partner was also sex working.

*Figure 2: Participants’ sexuality*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexuality</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homosexual</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>87.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In comparison to recent studies delineating the accommodation of sex workers across the unregulated industry (Rowe, 2011a), participants in this study were relatively financially stable and living in clean, secure and private dwellings.

**Figure 3: Participants’ accommodation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accommodation</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private rental</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>79.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government housing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeowner</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of clients seen per week ranged from those seeing one or several clients on a part-time basis (i.e. outside of their full time ‘straight’ employment), to those seeing in excess of 10 clients per week and relying on sex work as their sole or primary source of income.

**Figure 4: Number of clients seen per week**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of clients per week</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10+</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(01) Adam – 27 years

Born in Melbourne, Adam had been working as an independent Internet-based sex worker for several months at the time of our interview. Following a troubled upbringing where his father was convicted of paedophilia, Adam left his family home at 13 and was raised by distant relatives. He enjoys his work in the sex industry immensely and is open and honest about his circumstances and experiences, and refuses to feel shame towards his involvement in sex work.

(02) Raymond – 20 years

Originally from Tasmania, Raymond had been living in Melbourne for approximately one year prior to the interview, and was enrolled in a performing arts degree at a local university. Several friends of his were sex working over the Internet and, given he was unemployed and having difficulty finding work, suggested he give it a try. Raymond lives in a share house in the inner-city and only feels comfortable disclosing details of his work to his close friends.

(03) Brian – 26 years

Brian is a fulltime student studying medicine and living with his parents. Having had some prior experience in the sex industry when living in London several years ago, Brian considers Internet-based sex work to be a convenient and lucrative method of supporting himself while studying. However, at the time of our interview, Barry was eager to leave sex work behind and establish himself in the medical field.

(04) Seth – 30 years

At the time of our interview, Seth had been involved in sex work for approximately one year, although he had prior experience as a street worker when he was a teenager. Having recently completed a law degree, Seth was taking some ‘time out’ to save some money and travel before finding employment in the legal field. Seth also has a strong sporting background which he would often draw upon in forging a marketable sex working identity.

(05) Karl – 40 years

As a sex worker of over fifteen years, Karl is one of the older and more experienced participants interviewed. Karl felt as though his time in the sex industry was due to end. He was considering
his long term career prospects, and had recently commenced an online counselling course. He holds grave concerns for many men in the sex industry, and is particularly troubled by (his perceptions) of high rates of drug use and unsafe sexual practices in the industry.

(06) Jed – 32 years

The sole street sex worker and heterosexual male in the sample, Jed’s social and professional life differs significantly from other participants. Jed was homeless and relying heavily upon local services in the St Kilda area, and was taking psychotropic medication to alleviate psychosis. His engagement in sex work is sporadic, as he was only willing to service men amidst the presence of a female, with jobs acquired largely via word of mouth.

(07) Matheus – 36 years

Matheus is of French and Italian descent, and refers to himself as a ‘high class escort’. He has been sex working for close to fifteen years. Matheus entered the industry following a brief stint in modelling, and has many wealthy clients. He prides himself on his ability to genuinely connect with his clients; however he expressed his desire to leave the industry in the near future.

(08) Sam – 33 years

Engaging in ‘body work’ on a part-time basis, Sam, is of Indian heritage and works full-time in marketing. He is very reluctant to accept clients that do not ‘sound right’ and is financially secure to the extent where he is able to accept or decline jobs on his own terms. Sam has been involved in the sex industry for five years but is quite hesitant to engage with other workers or services.

(09) Miles – 21 years

Miles has been engaged in sex work for three years. He recently completed a degree in performance art and has plans to pursue a PhD after travelling Europe for several years. His partner is also a sex worker and on occasion they will work together, adopting a range of back stories to appeal to prospective clients.

(10) Bailey - 23 years

Bailey is committed to developing sound business acumen. He maintains a very wealthy and secure client base, and is always seeking to take on higher status clients. Bailey also operates
several personal businesses from home, and while he is trying to distance himself from sex work, he also appreciates the capital it affords him in pursuing his alternative endeavours.

(11) Steve – 33 years

Steve was one of the few participants with some experience of the street-based sex industry. The father of two children, Steve relies on sex work as his primary source of income, and has been in a committed homosexual relationship for several years. Steve spends much of the income he acquires from sex work on poker machines at Melbourne’s Crown Casino, but considers himself financially secure in comparison to the income he received while working the streets of St Kilda, an experience which he is reticent to speak about.

(12) Jack – 29 years

Raised in Brisbane and having only recently moved to Melbourne, Jack primary motive for engaging in sex work was to absolve himself of a large amount of debt. Although he works full-time for a product company, he relies heavily upon the extra income acquired through sex work to stay afloat. Jack holds very negative perceptions of sex workers as well as towards his own involvement in the industry, and is very reluctant to engage with other workers and support services.

(13) Kent – 32 years

At the time of our interview, Kent had only recently moved to Melbourne after living in Sydney for several years. He had spent many years prior overseas in Europe where much of his sex work experience had taken place. Kent considers his success in the industry to be a result of his large penis, and spoke of pursuing opportunities in gay porn where he might further capitalise on this asset.

(14) Anthony - 33 yrs

Although he had something of a tumultuous upbringing (living in government housing in a community plagued by problematic drug use), Anthony is proud of his achievements in life. He has travelled extensively overseas and is currently studying to be a tradesman. He describes himself as ‘rough trade’, and has worked in a range of settings in the sex industry, from street and brothel-based work through to pornographic websites.
(15) Joseph - 30 yrs

Born in Canberra and of Singaporean descent, Joseph has been living in Melbourne for about 6 years. He is currently studying business by correspondence, and has been operating from his apartment as a body worker for approximately five years. He has many loyal regulars which he attributes to his genuine and caring nature, which allows him to form strong bonds with others reasonably quickly.

(16) Jared – 26 years

Jared experienced a very modest upbringing in rural Victoria, which stands in stark contrast to the lifestyle to which he has become accustomed in Melbourne. He is studying design and living with his boyfriend in a lavish townhouse supplied by his older, wealthy and married ‘sugar daddy’. He has extensive experience in the local and international porn industry, and considers himself to be rather well known within the local gay scene.

(17) Santos - 31 years

Having only very recently commenced his career as a sex worker at the time of our interview, Santos works in the travel industry full time and attends to clients on the weekends in order to make extra cash. He is quite suspicious of others’ intentions and prefers not to engage with his clients in any significant or emotive way. Of Italian descent, he heavily plays upon the ‘Italian Stallion’ stereotype in his advertising and offline interactions with clients.

(18) Tom – 24 years

Tom is a very busy sex worker and has been involved in the sex industry for six years. Employed full time in media, discretion and confidentiality is of paramount importance to him. He enjoys providing services of a ‘kinky’ nature to his expansive client base and prides himself on the quality of his services, taking the work and his sexual health very seriously.

(19) Lachlan - 22 years

Studying to be a dancer and with plans to move overseas, at the time of our interview Lachlan had only been sex working for a month. Unlike many others, he does not adopt a professional attitude to his involvement in the industry. His disinterest was reflected in his lax approach toward advertising and seeing clients, and he expressed an eagerness to cease working once he had raised enough capital to finance his overseas trip.
(20) Tyrone – 24 years

Originally from Singapore, Tyrone has been involved in the industry for several years. He considers his conservative culture to be stifling and finds sex work to be an effective and enjoyable means through which he can experiment and lead a fulfilling and exciting homosexual life. Tyrone studies multimedia full-time and relies on the funds received from sex work to pay for his recently acquired mortgage.

(21) Barry - 25 years

Having only recently moved to Melbourne from Sydney, Barry was finding it difficult to adjust to the working and legislative context of male sex work in Melbourne, considering it substantially more difficult to make regular money in Melbourne. He was apprehensive towards working in Melbourne without registration, although he continued to do so. He enjoys sex work for the most part, despite considering many of his clients (past and present) to be ‘creeps’. He intends to study in the next couple of years so that he can develop an additional skill set.

(22) Neil – 35 years

Neil is a confident, sociable and open person, who feels he has found something of a ‘calling’ in sex work. With a background as a sales manager, he became attracted to the autonomy offered by the sex industry and has been sex working ‘on and off’ for three years. He identifies as bisexual and finds his ‘tradie’ image to be very popular and a source of arousal for both himself and his clients.

(23) Matt – 25 years

Matt is originally from Brisbane and completed a degree in theatre studies prior to moving to Melbourne. He is currently working in finance full-time and engages in sex work for his own personal enjoyment in place of any monetary gain or economic necessity. He has been with his partner for six months and although he is open with his partner about his activities, he fears that the current arrangement is unsustainable in the long term and that he may be required to cease working in the industry for the sake of his relationship.
(24) John - 28 years

Originally from Singapore, as a body worker Ian is considerably strict in regards to what type of service he provides (i.e. hand relief only), and prides himself on his professionalism and adequate massage training. He has been working for only eight months, and relies upon the extra income to cover his mortgage repayments, although he also works full-time as an engineer. He finds the work relaxing and rewarding, and conceives of continuing the work in the long-term.
Dear Andrew,

Re: Human Research Ethics Application – Register Number HRESC A-2000306-02/10

Professor Joseph Siracusa, Deputy Chair of the Design and Social Context College Human Ethics Advisory Network, has given executive approval to your ethics application entitled “Male Sex Workers: Life Patterns and the Construction of Identity”. This approval was ratified at the April 16th meeting of the committee.

I am pleased to advise that your application has been approved as Low Risk (Risk Level 2) classification by the committee. This approval will now be reported to the University Human Research Ethics Committee for noting.

This now completes the Ethics procedures. Your ethics approval expires in 31 March 2013.

Please note that all research data should be stored on University Network systems. These systems provide high levels of manageable security and data integrity, can provide secure remote access, are backed on a regular basis and can provide Disaster Recover processes should a large scale incident occur. The use of portable devices such as CDs and memory sticks is valid for archiving, data transport where necessary and some works in progress. The authoritative copy of all current data should reside on appropriate network systems; and the Principal Investigator is responsible for the retention and storage of the original data pertaining to the project for a minimum period of five years.

You are reminded that an Annual /Final report is mandatory and should be forwarded to the College Ethics Subcommittee Secretary by mid-December 2010. This report is available from:

URL: http://www.rmit.edu.au/rd/hrec_apply
Should you have any queries regarding your application please seek advice from the Deputy Chair of the College Human Ethics Advisory Network (CHEAN) Prof Joseph Siracusa on (03) 9925 1744, joseph.siracusa@rmit.edu.au or contact Cheryl de Leon on (03) 9925 2974 or email cheryl.deleon@rmit.edu.au

Please quote the ethics registration number and the name of the Project in any future correspondence.

On behalf of the Ethics Committee I wish you well in your research.

Yours sincerely,

CHERYL C DE LEON
Secretary
DSC Human Research Ethics Sub-Committee

cc: Dr James Rowe, GSSSP, Prof Pavla Miller, GSSSP
Interview questions: Participants

Original Pilot Interview Schedule approved April 2010

Can you tell me something about yourself and where you come from? How would you describe your situation in life (work, accommodation, relationships) and yourself as a person?

How do you identify in regards to sexual orientation? Gay/straight/bi/other? Cultural background?

When/where did you start to get involved in sex work? What were your reasons?

Do you feel like you freely chose to enter into sex work? If you had your time again, would you do it again?

Can you tell me a bit about your working environment?

What (if any) advantages does the Internet have over other mediums of sex work?

What reasons do you have for the growing popularity of the Internet amongst MSWs?

Do you enjoy your work? Do you feel safe and secure within it?

What other types of work have you done in the past, or continue to do on the side?

What would you say were the best and the worst things about sex work for you?

What’s your social circle like? Do you have any friends that work in the sex industry? Relationships with family/friends? Do they know/how do they feel about your involvement in sex work?

How do you feel towards your clients? Do you see or choose a particular type? How many would you see in an average week?

Do you think that sex work exposes you to anything that negatively or positively affects you?

Do you ever use drugs? How often would you say – never/occasionally/often?

How do you negotiate safe sex practises? Is it always a priority?

Have you ever had any problems with violence?

Do you have much to do with the gay scene?

Is there anything you think could be done to improve conditions for sex workers?

What is your understanding of sex work laws in Victoria?

Where do you advertise? How much do you have to pay for advertising etc?

What are you charging per hour/client and why?
Do you have much/any contact with services? Why/why not? What are your experiences with sex worker and other services?

Do you advertise in adherence to regulations (e.g. head and shoulder shots only, PCA number)

What would you like to see improved i.e. laws, advertising restrictions, testing, photos, regulations, tax?)

Do you feel as though you have any needs in the industry that aren’t being met? Why/why not?

Do you have much to do with other sex workers, on or offline?

Additional questions approved 26 October 2010

How would a client describe your profile to another person? How would you like them to?

Do you adjust and modify your profile regularly? Does it have anything to do with experiences in encounters – e.g. what works/what doesn’t?

How do you usually go about speaking to clients in initial contacts? What sort of tone, or image do you attempt to convey? Are you successful in these attempts?

What happens when clients first get in touch with you – e.g. how does it work/what do they say?

What type of image or identity do you try to portray over the net? When you were developing your profile, how/why did you choose the text and images that you did? What purpose do they serve? Do clients ever comment on your profile?

Do you pay attention to other workers’ profiles? Were there any patterns or similarities in the ways in which other workers had designed their profiles?

How can you tell when a client wants something in particular from you? What do they say/you say in return to accommodate/not accommodate this? How often does it correlate to something you have posted on your profile?

What do you think are the qualities and behaviours of successful sex workers?

What sort of advice would you offer to someone starting out in the industry?

During a recent encounter, can you describe what was required of you? Did you have to do anything in particular to get yourself feeling a particular way i.e. ‘headspace’?

Do you ever feel as though you have to do anything to get the client to ‘feel’ a particular way? How hard is this process? Does it require a lot of energy?

How would you describe your working persona? Is it very similar/different to your own? E.g. clothing, sexual tastes. Is it fairly constant or subject to change?
Do you find it easy to adapt to new people and new situations? Do you actively try to make your clients like you?

Do you agree with this statement: ‘I try to be everything to everyone’. Why/why not?