Student involvement in the UK sex industry

Motivations and experiences

Abstract

The Student Sex Work Project was set up in 2012 in the United Kingdom (UK) to locate students who are involved in the sex industry, to discover their motivations and needs, and in doing so provide an evidence base to consider the development of policy and practice within Higher Education. As part of this initiative, a large survey was undertaken comprising students from throughout the UK. Reporting on the findings from this survey, the article sheds some light on what occupations students take up in the sex industry, what motivates their participation and how they experience the work. The study also offers a much-needed empirical input to the ongoing academic debates on the nature of sex work. The results suggest that there can be little doubt of a student presence within the sex industry in the UK. The motivations and experiences of student sex workers cover elements of agency and choice as well as of force and exploitation and it is suggested that student sex work is best understood from a polymorphous framework which leaves room for a wide variety of experiences and challenges.

Key Words higher education, students, sex work, UK

Word Count – 8714

Re-submitted on 19 December 2014

Background

As the sex industry expands in line with general trends in the globalization of markets, so does research on the phenomenon of student engagement in the sex industry, which has been observed for example in Europe (Duvall Smith 2006) and Australasia (Lantz 2005; Sedgeman 2004). In the UK, since the late 1990s, a student presence in the sex industry has been documented both anecdotally in the media (Barrett 1997; Chapman 2001; Whitaker 2001; BBC News 2004; Duvall Smith 2006; Brinkworth 2007; Dolman 2008; Channel 4 News 2012; Robertson 2012) and by a small but growing body of academic literature (e.g. Roberts, Jones, and Sanders 2012; Sanders and Hardy 2012). Yet it remains true to say that there is a paucity of research on student engagement in the sex industry in the UK, and that understanding is further limited by data being derived from relatively small studies. Nevertheless, the data that does exist suggests that student awareness of a fellow student's involvement in the sex industry has greatly increased over the years from 3.4 per cent in 1999 (Roberts et al. 2000) to 25.7 per cent in 2009 (Roberts et al. 2010). Furthermore, it has been proposed that approximately 6 per cent of students could be engaged in some form of occupation in the industry (Roberts et al. 2012), with 16.5 per cent having considered taking up such an occupation (Roberts et al. 2010).

Despite researchers making small inroads over several years into this relatively new phenomenon, a lack of comprehensive understanding remains and there is a need for researching students' journeys into, during, and out of the sex industry (Sanders and Hardy 2014: 16). The Student Sex Work Project was set up to fill this gap and carried out

large scale empirical work with students across the UK. Based in Wales, the project is a collaborative partnership between academics, front line service providers and the National Union of Students Cymru. This paper relies on data from this project and focuses on student participation and consideration of participation in the sex industry as well as student sex workers' motivations and experiences. In doing so, the study offers a much-needed empirical input to the ongoing academic debates on the nature of sex work and if, why and how it is problematic for those involved in it.

Definitions of sex work

As pointed out by Harcourt and Donovan (2005: 201) the boundaries of sex work are vague. Therefore it is not straightforward to define what falls under 'sex work' and the same can be said for the 'sex industry'. The present study is based on the broad description of sex work as formulated by Weitzer (2010a: 1) in terms of 'the exchange of sexual services, performances, or products for material compensation'. As such the term 'sex work' can be used as an umbrella term for a wide range of behaviours that imply varying levels of intimacy. References to the 'sex industry' in its turn not only covers sex workers but also those who are involved in the organization of sex work (e.g. the managers).

To confer some order on this wide spectrum of behaviours, distinctions are commonly made between different types of sex work. For example the directness and explicitness of the sexual service itself has been employed to demarcate prostitution (and also perhaps lap dancing) from indirect services, referring for example to pornography or

stripping (e.g. Weitzer 2010a; Vanwesenbeeck 2001). A distinction can also be made according to the directness and explicitness with which the sexual transaction itself is negotiated and the extent in which it is the primary source of income (Harcourt and Donovan 2005). Thus sex work is not only diverse in terms of behaviour but also in terms of organization and the level of actual involvement, going from being the sole source of income to an (occasional provision of) additional income. Therefore, grasping the scope and breadth of students' involvement in the sex industry not only requires that a wide range of activities are taken into account but also that the level of actual engagement (in terms of regularity and the amount of money it generates) is understood.

Opposing paradigms on sex work

The lack of large-scale empirical data on the inroads and lived experiences of sex workers has allowed debates on the nature of sex work (if and why it is a problem and consequentially what measures need to be taken) to be influenced by ideology. From a radical feminist perspective, women do not choose to sell sexual services and those who do are victims of male sexual exploitation (see for example, Farley 2004). Prostitution, then, is seen as intrinsically harmful and traumatizing and the use of the term 'prostituted women' emphasizes that prostitution is something that is 'done' to women as opposed to a voluntary practice (Weitzer 2010b; Outshoorn 2005). The exchange of sex for money is not only seen as an act of violence against the prostitute but by extension to all women in society because of the endorsement of patriarchal opperssion that it represents (e.g. Barry 1995; Jeffries 1997). The tradition in academic as well as in policy circles to understand

sex work as a predominantly gendered occupation – quite simply the majority of sellers of sex are generally assumed to be female and the majority of purchasers of sex are assumed to be male – enhances such gendered understandings of the nature of prostitution.

At the other end of the spectrum, a sex work rights approach acknowledges agency by those women and men who make a rational decision to take up an occupation in the sex markets (see for example, Sanders, O'Neill, and Pitcher 2009; Agustín 2006). Note that within this framework, the term sex work is used as a less derogatory and stigmatising label for the act of prostitution (e.g. Masenior and Beyrer 2007). Sex work, then, is regarded as a legitimate economic survival strategy (Rosen and Venkatesh 2008) or as a potential stepping stone to a life with better opportunities (Saunders 2005). Within such framework, exchanging sexual services for money is not problematic but the labour conditions and socio-legal barriers are (Krüsi et al. 2012; Sanders 2004).

In order to understand whether student sex work represents violence and exploitation or agency and choice – or both – it is thus necessary to understand the reasons why students participate in the sex industry and how they experience this. This study therefore draws on emprical data from The Student Sex Work Project and in doing so tests the opposing oppression and empowerment paradigms against the experiences of student sex workers.

Motivations and experiences of sex work

Student engagement in the sex industry is suggested to go hand in hand with rising tuition fees and consequential student impoverishment (Roberts, Jones, and Sanders 2013). As such the increased academic and media attention for student sex work is perhaps unsurprising given the increased cost of higher education in the UK, as well as in many other countries across Europe (Payne et al. 2013). In addition to this the current climate of austerity needs to be taken into account in which jobs themselves – of any kind – are not so readily available for anyone including students (Rhodes 2012). Thus taking up occupation in the sex industry could be appealing to students in the belief that they secure an income, an income that may be regarded as potentially higher than that provided by the usual array of student jobs. Without longitudinal research, however, it is impossible to state categorically that students are *increasingly* engaged in the sex industry to generate an income to put themselves through University (Sanders and Hardy 2014). Students themselves do widely understand the lack of money in their lives as a principal motivating factor for working in the sex industry (Roberts et al. 2010). Also a recent study with 197 erotic dancers indicated that one third of respondents were students whose core reason for taking up the occupation was the high cost of Higher Education (Sanders and Hardy 2014).

Economic considerations are undeniably important in students' decisions to work in the sex industry, but it would be a mistake to neatly sever student impoverishment and the motivation to escape from debt from the normalisation and mainstreaming of sexual consumption (Attwood 2006; Brents and Sanders 2010). While the sex industry has historically been linked to sexual services provided by the working class (McLeod 1982),

its expansion into the high street and the burgeoning of internet enabled services has generated a variety of occupations and different forms of labour that are today taken up by individuals as both service providers and consumers from different social classes (Bernstein 2007). Indeed, Sagar and Jones (2014) found that women who worked in massage parlours came from a variety of different backgrounds, some were highly qualified, some were students, however they were all united in their motivation to earn money from selling intimate sexual services. In addition to economic benefits, their study revealed other motivations such as the flexibility of working hours and enjoyment. Thus whilst there are indications that financial pressure underlies students' decision to work in the sex industry, there is no large-scale empirical data that can confirm this assumption, nor is it clear if and to what extent such economic motivations are complemented with more intrinsic motivations for taking up work in the sex industry.

It is highly likely that the underlying reasons for selling sexual services are directly related to the experience of it. If sex work is to be understood as a 'choice' this implies that there were a reasonable number of alternative options available. As such it might be expected that students who sell sexual services out of economic necessity and a lack of alternative employment opportunities will have a more negative experience as compared to students who have a genuine interest in working in the sex industry. Importantly however, the motivations for working in the sex industry are not the sole factors that impact on the experience of the work. Research on the lived experiences of sex workers themselves identifies the potential violence from clients, stigmatization and the threat of being exposed as a sex worker as the main stressors that affect sex workers'

wellbeing (e.g. Leaker and Dunk-West 2011; Sanders 2004; Sanders 2005). This research has however to date focused on 'career sex workers' and therefore it is not clear to what extent these are also the lived experiences of student sex workers.

This study

The present study captured the full scope of students' engagement in the sex industry and included all behaviours that fall under the broad definition of 'the exchange of sexual services, performances, or products for material compensation' but also included organizational and auxiliary roles that are part of the sex industry. In order to draw some clear lines in the myriad of occupations, sex workers in this study were divided into two categories based on the level of intimacy with a client: those who engage in commercial sexual activities that include 'direct physical contact between buyers and sellers' (prostitution) and those who engage in 'indirect sexual stimulation' (e.g. pornography, stripping, telephone sex). The latter category also includes two activities that are traditionally not associated with the sex industry, namely naked butler [1] (as this is in fact comparable to stripping) and glamour modelling in terms of nude photography. In the current climate in the UK, nude photography is considered to endorse harmful attitudes towards women, witnessed by the national campaign to ban nude topless photography from British tabloid newspapers (see, No More Page Three: http://nomorepage3.wordpress.com/). This campaign is also supported by some National Union of Students representatives, who contend that glamour modelling forms part of the ongoing 'sexual objectification of women for male gratification' debate (see, Student

Union Nottingham 2014). Therefore we considered it crucial to include this type of work in our study.

Concretely, the study was steered by three principal research goals which not only enhance our understanding of student sex work but which also offer the much needed empirical input to the debates on if, how and why sex work is a problem. The first goal was to come to a clear picture of the scope and breadth of students' actual and considered participation in the sex industry. Thereby the full range of activities was considered and attention went to differences according to gender and age. The second goal was to understand with what regularity student sex workers are involved in the sex industry and how much money they make from it. Thereby the attention shifted to those who perform sex work only thus leaving out of consideration those with an organizational or auxiliary role only. As students generally have alternative sources of income available to them as well as being predominantly engaged in full time studies, it was anticipated that some students might engage in sex work on a rather irregular basis. Differences were expected between those who do and those who do not perform direct – intimate – sexual services. The third goal was to understand students' motivations and experiences of doing sex work (again leaving out those with an organizational or auxiliary role only). It was expected that students who made a more 'positive' choice for working in the industry would have more positive experiences. Also differences were expected to occur according to the type of sex work engaged in (direct versus indirect).

Method

Sample and Design

Data were gathered through an online survey and a cross-sectional design was employed. Participation was not randomized and thus a convenience sample was derived. The recruitment of respondents initially focused on Wales and then extended to the rest of the UK. Potential respondents were recruited through different channels including an email to 6,000 students on the National Union of Students Extra database in Wales, three strategic campaigns in Welsh universities, an online social media promotion campaign from the Student Sex Work Project Website, an online survey link emailed to students at 9 of 12 Welsh universities and emails sent out to UK students via the commercial student engagement company Student Beans.

Eligibility for participation was based on being enrolled as a student in a university in the UK. In all 10,991 respondents started the survey of which 4,218 dropped out before reaching the questions on participation in the sex industry thus withholding 6,773 respondents for the present study. The age ranged from 16 to 66 (M = 21.51; Mode = 19; SD = 5.417); 32.4 per cent was male, 66.4 per cent female, 0.4 per cent categorised themselves as transgender and 0.7 per cent did not specify their gender. Respondents came from higher education institutions in England (47.7 per cent), Wales (48.0 per cent), Scotland (3.6 per cent) and Northern Ireland (0.6 per cent). Most respondents had UK nationality (19.3 per cent Welsh, 2.8 per cent Scottish, 1.6 per cent Northern Irish and 65.2 per cent English) but also other EU students (5.9 per cent) and non-EU students (5.1 per cent) were represented. Most respondents (89.1 per cent) were studying on an

undergraduate program, 10.8 per cent studied on a postgraduate course and 0.1 per cent did a combination of both. The survey was granted ethical approval by the College of Law Research Ethics board at Swansea University.

Measurements

Participation in the sex industry. Respondents were asked to indicate for a range of 18 activities whether or not they had ever engaged in it. Six options referred to activities that imply the explicit and direct selling of sexual services (hereafter referred to as 'direct sex work'): prostitution, escorting, selling sexual services independently, selling sexual services on the street, selling sexual services in a massage parlour/brothel/sauna, and professional dominant or submissive. Note that there exists overlap between the different options which aimed at avoiding that some respondents would not identify with a certain description. Seven options referred to activities that offer indirect sexual stimulation (hereafter referred to as 'indirect sex work'): erotic dancing, stripping, phone sex, web cam sex, acting in the porn industry, working as a naked butler and glamour modelling (nude photography). In order to compare respondents engaged in direct and indirect sex work, respondents were assigned to one unique group whereby involvement in direct sex work was given preference over involvement in indirect sex work (for those who were involved in both types of sex work).

In addition to sex work activities, five activities referred to organizational and auxiliary roles within the sex industry: working as a madam or manager, an escort agency

manager, working as a pimp, driver for sex workers and receptionist in a massage parlour/brothel/sauna.

Regularity and income of working in the sex industry. Respondents who ever performed sex work were asked whether they were still doing this work at the moment of completing the survey (with the answering categories 'yes', 'no', or 'not sure'), the periods in the year that they work or worked in the sex industry (with the answering categories 'during term time only', 'during holidays only' and 'both during term time and holidays'), the number of hours spent weekly on working in the sex industry (with seven options going from 'less than five hours' to '30 hours or more'), for how long they had been working in the sex industry (with five options going from 'six months or less' to 'five years or more'), and how much money they made on average on a monthly basis (with 15 answering categories going from 'less than £50' to '£5000 or more').

Motivations. Respondents were asked to indicate the reasons that had been important in their decision to work in the sex industry (1 = important; 2 = not important), based on a list of 15 possible reasons covering financial reasons (five items), intrinsic reasons (six items), practical reasons (three items) and force (one item). To reduce the number of variables, a principal component analysis (PCA) was performed (with Direct Oblimin Rotation) which is an acceptable method for dimension reduction based on binary data (Jolliffe 2002). Based on Spearman rho correlations between the 15 items, two items were left out of consideration as they did not correlate with any other item with a value greater than .3 (i.e. 'I had friends who worked in adult entertainment/sex work' and 'I felt forced to' which was retained as a category on its own). The PCA retained two

principal components (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of adequacy = .797; total variance explained = 46.86 per cent) distinguishing between financial and practical considerations versus intrinsic reasons related to the work itself. Table I shows the component loadings for each of the items showing that each item added in a meaningful way to one of the components. Two new measures were constructed based on the sum of the weighted scores (binary score X component loading), divided by the number of items for each component. As such a first variable refers to 'the aggregated importance of financial and practical reasons' (Range 0.57 – 1.13; M = 0.81; SD = 0.167) and a second variable refers to 'the aggregated importance of intrinsic reasons' (Range 0.61 – 1.22; M = 0.92; SD = 0.237).

Safety and experience of sex work. Respondents were asked to indicate on a five-point Likert scale how often they felt safe in their work environment, going from 'never' (score 1) to 'always' (score 5). Experiences were measured by presenting 7 possible positive and 21 possible negative elements whereby respondents were asked to tick all applicable elements.

Demographic background. Gender was questioned by the categories 'male', 'female', 'transgender', and 'other'. Age was questioned in an open-answer numeric question. 'Young students' (ages 16 to 26, N = 5,499) were distinguished from 'mature students' (27 to 66, N = 566).

Analyses

Respondents' involvement in the sex industry is presented for each activity separately and per aggregated category. Differences in participation between male and female respondents and between young and mature students were tested by Chi-square tests. The duration, regularity and intensity of engagement in the sex industry as well as the motivations and experiences are explored for those involved in direct and indirect sex work with Chi-square tests testing the differences between both types of sex work. Whether or not there was a difference in the extent in which both types of sex workers felt safe in their work environment was tested by means of a One-way Anova test. The relation between the aggregated motivation measures and experiences was tested by Spearman Rho correlations.

Results

Students' actual and considered involvement in the sex industry

First, as to the considered involvement in the sex industry, overall one fifth of the respondents indicated ever having considered this (21.9 per cent; 95 per cent confidence interval within 20.88 per cent to 22.96 per cent). Female respondents were more likely than male respondents to consider participation with 23.6 per cent and 18.5 per cent for female and male respondents respectively ($\chi^2(1) = 19.13$; $p < .001$). There was no difference in consideration between young and mature students. When looking at the type of work that was considered, indirect sex work was the most popular with 18.6 per cent of the respondents having considered this, against 9.0 per cent for direct sex work and 2.9 per cent for organisational/auxiliary roles.

Second, respondents' actual engagement in activities related to the sex industry is presented in table II, for all respondents taken together and according to gender. In addition to male and female respondents, also five transgender respondents, 7 respondents who did not identify with any gender and 73 respondents who did not fill in their gender were involved in the sex industry. Overall 326 respondents from a total of 6,773 had undertaken some sort of activity in the sex industry which equates to 4.8 per cent of the sample (95 per cent confidence interval within 4.29 per cent to 5.33 per cent). Activities referring to indirect sex work were the most frequently engaged in, and within this category especially selling services on the internet/webcam, erotic dancing, glamour modelling and stripping were popular. Three quarters of the respondents took part in only one category of activities (74.8 per cent, $N = 244$), about one fifth was active in two categories (20.9 per cent, $N = 68$), and a minority was active in each category (4.3 per cent, $N = 14$).

Proportionately more male (5.0 per cent) than female respondents (3.4 per cent) were involved in the sex industry. Male participation was significantly higher than female participation for activities referring to direct sex work and organisational/auxiliary roles although the latter were also very uncommon among male respondents with less than 1 per cent being involved in it. Furthermore the frequency rates and significance tests showed that the mature students were more involved in the sex industry than younger students (8.5 per cent against 3.5 per cent for both groups respectively).

[Insert Table II about here]

The further analyses focus on respondents involved in direct and indirect sex work thus leaving out of consideration those who had an organizational or auxiliary role only. In total 134 respondents were assigned to the group 'direct sex work' (those involved in direct sex work activities regardless of overlapping involvement with indirect sex work) and 183 respondents were assigned to the group 'indirect sex work' (those involved in indirect sex work activities only).

Regularity of and generated income through sex work

The overall picture shows that only 16.2 per cent of the respondents who indicated any of the sex work activities were still doing this work at the moment of completing the survey. When looking at the duration of previous involvement, the majority (54.0 per cent) had been involved for less than 6 months and another quarter (27.0 per cent) had been involved for between six months and one year. Most students who worked in the industry (currently as well as previously) did so for less than five hours a week (54.1 per cent) and about a quarter (26.2 per cent) for between five and ten hours a week. Most respondents said they worked both during term time and holidays (55.8 per cent) while 20.1 per cent said they only worked during term time and 24.1 per cent only during the holidays. The money generated through working in the sex industry varied greatly. Of the 187 respondents who answered this question, 25 (13.4 per cent) earned less than £50 per

month and another 25 earned more than £1000. Over half of the respondents (51.3 per cent) made less than £300 per month.

Several differences emerged according to the type of involvement in the sex industry. Those involved in direct sex work were more likely to have ongoing involvement at the time of survey completion (26.6 per cent versus 8.6 per cent; χ^2 (4) =25.29; $p < .001$), less likely to be engaged in the short term (i.e. for less than 6 months; 40.5 per cent versus 63.6 per cent; χ^2 (4) = 14.25; $p < .01$), and more likely to have made more money as compared to those involved in indirect sex work. Whilst more than half of those with direct involvement made more than £500 per month, more than half of those involved in indirect sex work made less than £200 per month. Also 18 of the 25 high-earners (those making more than £1000 per month) were found among those involved in direct sex work.

Overall it can be said that those involved in selling direct sexual services, were more likely to do the work for longer, to do so for more hours per week and to make substantially more money from it.

Student sex workers' motivations and experiences

Motivations. Table III lists the reasons for doing sex work per group of motivations and in order of stated importance. The table includes the percentages of respondents indicating the given reason was 'important' in their decision to do the work. The list suggests that economic considerations (funding lifestyle and covering basic living expenses), job flexibility, anticipated enjoyment, funding education and curiosity were

the primary motivating factors behind entry into the industry. A relatively small but therefore not unimportant number of 14 per cent said to feel forced to work in the sex industry. There were hardly any differences between the two classes of sex workers with the exception that 'sexual pleasure' and 'the hours suited my studies' were mentioned more by those involved in direct selling of sexual services. Independent samples t-tests showed no differences between both groups of workers as to their outcome on the measure for 'aggregated importance of financial/practical reasons' and 'aggregated importance of intrinsic reasons'.

[Insert Table III about here]

Feeling safe. With regards to feeling safe while at work over three-quarters (75.5 per cent) reported feeling safe 'always' or 'very often' whilst only 7.8 per cent reported they felt safe 'rarely' or 'never'. Those selling services directly felt less safe on average (M = 3.84 versus 4.25; $t(227) = -3.124$; $p < .01$) than those with other involvement. Feeling safe was also related to the motivations for doing the work, with a negative correlation between feeling forced and feeling safe ($r = -.23$; $p < .01$) and a positive relation between the aggregated importance of intrinsic reasons and feeling safe ($r = .23$; $p < .01$).

Positive elements. With regard to the positive aspects of the work, 220 respondents completed this question. Table IV shows the results for this question for all respondents together and according to the type of activities involved in. Overall, 'good money' and

'flexible hours' were ticked most often. The elements 'good money' and 'sexual pleasure' were indicated more often by those selling direct sexual services.

[Insert Table IV about here]

Negative elements. The question on negative elements of the work was completed by 211 respondents. Table V shows the results for the ten most mentioned options, for all respondents taken together and according to type of work. Of the 21 options that were offered, 'secrecy' was mentioned most often and this regardless of the type of work. While 'fear of violence' was also mentioned rather frequently, the item 'violence' itself was only mentioned by 15.2 per cent. 'Fear of violence' was mentioned twice as often by those with involvement in directly selling sexual services. Similarly these respondents were also more likely to state that their work affected their view of sex.

[Insert Table V about here]

Relation between motivations and experience. Tables IV and V show how the positive and negative experiences of working in the sex industry were related to the underlying motivations for doing the work. Those for whom financial and practical reasons were important for entering the sex industry, were more likely to mention the good money, flexible hours and to a lesser extent freedom of employment regulations as positive elements of their work, but they were also more likely to mention secrecy, negative

judgements from friends and family, sexual exploitation and competition with other sex workers as negative elements. For those who were more motivated by intrinsic reasons, especially sexual pleasure, good working conditions and freedom from employment regulations were seen as positive elements and they were less likely to mention negative effects on self-esteem. Those who felt forced were not more likely to mention any positive element but indicated a range of perceived negative elements, especially a negative effect on self-esteem and sexual exploitation, followed by lack of employment rights and fear of violence.

Discussion

The goal of the present study was to identify the scope and breadth of students' actual and considered engagement in the sex industry and to understand their underlying motivations as well as experiences. Specific attention went to differences between sex work that does and does not involve direct intimate contact with a client. The study builds on and considerably extends current knowledge of student engagement in the sex industry and has implications for the way in which sex work is understood.

The data on the degree of involvement confirms what had been suggested by previous, smaller-scale research (Roberts et al. 2012), namely that students' engagement in the sex industry is now an established feature of the higher education landscape. However, the overall picture which emerges here is considerably more complex than that provided by previous studies. Students' participation in the sex industry was highly diverse in terms of the types of activities they were involved in but also in terms of the regularity with which they were involved in it. Most students who performed sex work

did not do this on a full-time basis and in fact for most this work was not a regular source of income. This could be expected given that most students will have financial support from their parents or rely on student loans. The place that the sex industry occupies in their lives will thus be substantially different to full-time sex workers that are usually the subjects of research. The present study made use of collated categories of sex work whereby the intensity of participation was not taken into account. It is likely, however, that sex workers who engage in the work on a more regular basis have different motivations and experiences compared to those who do the work only sporadically. Future research could pay more attention to such differences.

Although there is ample anecdotal evidence of male students' involvement in selling sexual services (e.g. Anonymous 2012 and Dixon 2012 for a discussion of male medical students working as escorts) a major unexpected finding was that male students were proportionately more involved in prostitution than female students. It is possible that the neglect of men in sex work research has led to a general misconception of men's involvement in the industry. As argued by Nicola Smith (2012: 590): '*The focus on women tends to be justified (if it is justified at all) on the grounds that "the vast majority" of sex workers are female; indeed, a huge amount of theoretical weight rests upon the shoulders of this empirical assertion and yet it is never really interrogated empirically.'* Thus, if taken at face value, the results of the present study suggest that the proportion of men performing sexual labour needs to be reconsidered. It can be recommended that future research ends the neglect of male (and transgender) sex workers which has been 'central to the perpetuation of women-as-victims discourses' (Smith

2012: 591). We do consider alternative explanations for the high proportion of male sex workers, including that males engaging in sex work are more likely to report this or that some males are more likely to exaggerate their involvement in the first place. At the same time, females involved in sex work may be more likely to underreport involvement. However, even when taking into account such possible distortions we do believe that the results are strong enough to conclude that the presence of male student sex workers needs to be acknowledged.

With regard to the findings on motivations and experiences the study confirmed prevous findings and extended the current knowledge base. The results accorded with existing work showing that economic considerations loom large in students' motivations to take up this kind of work (Roberts et al. 2010; Sanders and Hardy 2014). In respondents' eyes, the money from sex work enables them to avoid debt, cover basic living expenses and fund their lifestyle. Furthermore the work was considered to be highly flexible whereas this might be less the case for more traditional jobs. Linked to this finding, 'good money' was the most mentioned positive element of performing sex work. It needs to be kept in mind, however, that there are by far more students with financial difficulties than that there are students who make money in the sex industry. Further research needs to clarify how students who do and who do not engage in the sex industry differ when it comes to their financial background and when it comes to how they deal with the financial challenges that come with higher education.

A substantial proportion (also) indicated having a more intrinsic intrest for working in the sex industry and indicated that they enjoyed the work itself. As sex work

research tends to focus on the problematic aspects of it, these intrinsic motivations and positive experiences tend to stay under the radar. That sex work is not necessarily a negative experience is also suggested by a recent study with 177 porn actresses which found that these women did not report poorer well-being compared to a matched comparison group (Griffith et al. 2013). In our study a range of negative experiences were also mentioned, however, broadly covering the stressful nature of the work itself (potentially unpleasant customers, fear of violence), its psychological consequences (for self-esteem and attitudes toward sex), its social consequences (the stigma attached to it which drives negative judgement from friends and family and concomitant secrecy) and the socio-legal employment context within which the work is embedded (e.g. unpredictable earnings and lack of employment rights). This confirms what has been previously suggested by several researchers, that the difficulties experienced by sex workers are not only related to the work itself but also stem from the labour conditions and societal responses to it (e.g. Scoular 2004; Krüsi et al. 2012; Sanders 2004).

An important merit of the present research was that the experiences of sex work were assessed according to the type of sex work and the motivations for doing the work. This showed that respondents involved in direct sex work (prostitution) were more likely to fear violence, feel unsafe and experience a negative effect on how they viewed sex but they were also more likely to report sexual pleasure, good clients and good money as positive elements. The latter was not unsurprising because those working in prostitution also made substantially more money compared to those who exchanged less direct sexual services. Furthermore, being motivated by intrinsic reasons for doing the work (wanting

to do that work) was protective against negative experiences while feeling forced and feeling driven by financial/practical reasons were conducive to a range of negative experiences. Overall the study offers empirical support for a polymorphous frame of the sex industry, as proposed by Weitzer (2010b) which states that the sex market is highly diverse with different risks and challenges related to different types of activities, and adds to this the importance of considering underlying motivations for stepping in the industry.

Methodological limitations

A key question when it comes to interpreting these results is the degree to which the sample can be considered representative of the general student population. First, participation to the survey was voluntary and selection effects can not be ruled out. Student sex workers might have felt especially motivated to participate in the survey as it might have felt more 'relevant' to them, but they also might have avoided it due to the risk for stigmatization and 'being found out'. Either way, the proportion of students involved in the sex industry could be deflated or inflated. However, that the percentage that was found in this study comfortably fits in the range of 2.7 per cent to 9.3 per cent that was found in former research (Roberts et al. 2012), we are hopeful that such selection effects have not distorted the results.

Second, given the initial focus of recruitment in Wales there is a disproportionate number of respondents from Wales and a corresponding under representation of students from England in comparison to the distribution of students in the UK. This may have led to some under-sampling of student sex workers from urban campus locations in England.

However, given the still high proportion of student respondents based in English universities, we do not believe that this constitutes a source of serious bias. In addition, the proportion of students from the four home countries who have been engaged in sex work closely mirrors the proportions of respondents found in the overall sample. A more serious issue concerns the disparity in the reported gender ratio in the sample compared to the national picture. Females comprise around 68 per cent of the current sample compared to a national figure of 56.2 per cent in UK higher education for the year 2012/13 (HESA 2014a). A degree of this oversampling of female students is associated with the proportion of undergraduates who completed the survey. First of all the proportion of undergraduate students in this sample (92.5 per cent) is not only greater than the 77.1 per cent for UK higher education as a whole, secondly undergraduates themselves are more likely to be female – comprising 63.9 per cent of the total according to the most recent figures (HESA2014b).

Conclusions

The findings discussed in this paper are derived from the largest data set on student sex work to date. Advancing the theoretical debates on sex work, the data clearly suggests that students who take up occupations in the sex industry have a variety of experiences that are not dissimilar to those of the wider sex work population; motivations are also varied. For example, while economic necessity is certainly a motivating factor it cannot be said that rising tuition fees is the only reason for students engaging in sex work. As the data showed, there are also other more intrinsic motivations such as perceived enjoyment

of the work. Shedding some much needed light on the experiences of student sex workers, the data also revealed elements of agency and choice as well as force and exploitation. Importantly therefore, in agreement with Weitzer (2010) we also argue that student sex work is best understood through a polymorphous model and not an opression model.

With tuition fees from students now keeping the higher education economy afloat the responsibility of educational institutions to respond pragmatically and to facilitate the provision of health, safety and welfare support to students engaged in or considering taking up sex work cannot be disputed. However, the wide variety of experiences student sex workers can and do face are likely to significantly test any student support service. The danger is that student support services may be quick to perceive students engaged in the sex industry as female victims who need saving (adopting a monolithic oppression perspective). When in fact, a student (male or female) may simply require support or advice pertaining to issues of employment for example and/or relationship advice due to low self esteem (a senario demanding a polymorphous perspective). Navigating a pathway through this environment in a manner which will minimise the potential damage to students will undoubtedly be challenging. Not only is an open discussion regarding the varied motivations and experiences of student sex workers necessary, but also arguably training and guidance for support services.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank everyone who participated in the study. The work was funded by the Big Lottery Innovation Fund. We are extremely grateful to the Big Lottery for funding this study.

Endnotes

1. Naked butler (also referred to as 'Butler in the Buff') is commonly taken up by males who are paid to deliver a range of services traditionally associated with the work of a 'butler' whilst naked/semi naked. Such as serving drinks and food and mingling with guests at parties predominantly attended by women. Some naked butlers also pose for photographs.

Bibliography

Agustín, L. 2006 ‘The disappearing of a migration category: Migrants who sell sex’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 32(1): 29-47.

Anonymous. 2012 ‘Confessions of a student prostitute’, *Student BMJ* 20: 14-15.

Attwood, F. 2006 ‘Sexed Up: Theorizing the Sexualization of Culture’, *Sexualities* 9(1): 7-94.

Barrett, D. 1997 ‘Students on the game’, *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, July 18.

Barry, K. 1995 *The Prostitution of Sexuality,* New York: New York University Press.

BBC News. 2004 *Student sells virginity on web* http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/bristol/3429769.stm (accessed January 2004).

Bernstein, E. 2007 ‘Sex work for the Middle Classes’, *Sexualities* 10(4): 473-88.

Brents, B. and Sanders, T. 2010 ‘The Mainstreaming of the Sex industry: Economic Inclusion and Social Ambivalence’, Special Issue for *Journal of Law & Society; Regulating Sex/Work: From Crime Control to Neo-liberalism* 37 (1): 40-60.

Brinkworth, L. 2007 ‘Students who sell sex’, *Cosmopolitan*. July, 60-2.

Channel 4 News. 2012 *Hard-up students seek help from sugar daddy website.* http://www.channel4.com/news/hard-up-students-seek-help-from-sugar-daddy-website (accessed May 2012).

Chapman, M. 2001 ‘Red light finds its way onto campus’, *Times Higher Educational Supplement* November 5 http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/features/red-light-finds-its-way-onto-campus/159667.article (accessed May 2014).

Dixon, J. 2012 ‘Medical schools’ attitudes towards student prostitution’, *Student BMJ*, 20: 16-8.

Dolman, K. 2008 *Selling sex to study*. http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/education/student/article3396280.ece (accessed February 19, 2008).

Duvall Smith, A. 2006 *Thousands of students join sex trade to fund degrees* http://www.independent.co.uk/news/europe/thousands-of-students-join-sex-trade-to-fund-degrees-422287.html (accessed October, 2006).

Farley, M. 2004 ‘Bad for the body bad for the heart: Prostitution harms women even if legalized or decriminalized’, *Violence against women* 10: 1087-125.

Griffith, J.D., Mitchell, S., Hart, C.L., Adams, L.T., & Gu, L.L. 2013 ‘Pornography actresses: An assessment of the damaged goods hypothesis’, *Journal of Sex Research* 50(7): 631-2.

Harcourt, C. & Donovan, B. 2005 ‘The many faces of sex work’, *Sexually Transmitted Infections* 81: 201-6.

HESA. 2014a http://www.hesa.ac.uk/ (accessed May 2014).

HESA. 2014b *Student Introduction* 2012/13. http://www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/3129/#sex (accessed May 2014).

Jeffries, S. 1997 *The idea of prostitution.* Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

Jolliffe, I.T. 2002 *Principal Component Analysis, Second Edition.* New York: Springer.

Krüsi, A., Chettiar, J., Ridgway, A., Abbott, J., Strathdee, S.A., & Shannon, K. 2012 ‘Negotiating safety and sexual risk reduction with clients in unsanctioned safer indoor

sex work environments: A qualitative study', *Research and Practice* 102(6): 1154-9.

Lantz S. 2005 'Students Working in the Melbourne Sex Industry: Education, Human Capital and the Changing Patterns of the Youth Labour Market', *Journal of Youth Studies* 8(4): 385-401.

Leaker, M., and Dunk-West, P. 2011 'Socio-cultural risk? Reporting on a qualitative study with female street-based sex workers', *Sociological Research Online* 16*:* 1-10.

Masenior NF, Beyrer C 2007 'The US Anti-Prostitution Pledge: First Amendment Challenges and Public Health Priorities', *PLoS Med* 4(7): e207.

McLeod, E. 1982 *Working Women: Prostitution now*. London: Crron Helm.

Outshoorn, J.(2005 'The political debates on prostitution and trafficking of women', *Social Politics,* 12: 141-55.

Payne, B. et al. 2013 *Compendium on financing of higher education: Final report of the financing the student's future project.* The European Student's Union (ESA).

Rhodes, C. 2012 'Youth Employment Statistics, Standard Note', *House of Commons Library*. http://www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/SN05871 (accessed May 22nd 2014).

Robertson, S. 2012 'The next best student job: phone sex?', *The Mancunian*. 18th April. http://www.student-direct.co.uk/2012/04/18/the-next-best-student-job-phone-sex/ (accessed July 2012).

Roberts, R., J. Golding, T. Towell, S. Reid, S. Woodford, A. Vetere, and I. Weinreb 2000 'Mental and physical health in students: The role of economic circumstances', *British Journal of Health Psychology* 5(3): 289-97.

Roberts, R., Jones, A., & Sanders, T. 2012 'Students and sex work in the UK:

providers and purchasers', *Sex Education: Sexuality, Society and Learning* 13(3)*:* 349-63.

Roberts, R., Sanders, T., Myers, E., & Smith, D. 2010 'Participation in sex work: students' views', *Sex Education* 10(2): 145-56.

Roberts, R., Jones, A. & Sanders, T. 2013 'The relationship between sex work and students in the UK: Providers and Purchasers', *Sex Education* 13(3): 349-63.

Rosen, E., & Venkatesh, S.A. 2008 'A "perversion" of choice – Sex work offers just enough in Chicago's urban ghetto', *Journal of Contemporary Etnography* 37(4): 417-41.

Sagar, T. and Jones, D. 2014 'Off Street Sex Workers and Victim Orientated Policy Making at the Local Level: Denial of Agency and Consequences of Victimhood' *Crime Prevention and Community Safety* 16: 230-52.

Sanders, T. 2004 'A continuum of risk? The management of health, physical and emotional risks by female sex workers', *Sociology of Health and Illness,* 26(5): 557-74.

Sanders, T., O'Neill, M., & Pitcher, J. 2009 *Prostitution: Sex work, policy and politics.* London: SAGE.

Sanders, T. 2005 *Sex Work: A Risky Business.* Devon, UK: Willan Publishing.

Sanders, T. & Hardy, K. 2012 'Devalued, Deskilled and Diversified: Explaining the Proliferation of Lap Dancing in the UK', *British Journal of Sociology* 63(3): 513-32.

Sanders, T and Hardy, K 2014 'Students Selling Sex: Marketisation, Higher Education and Consumption', *British Journal of Sociology of Education* OPEN ACCESS

Saunders, P. 2005 'Traffic violations : Determining the meaning of violence in sexual trafficking versus sex work', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 20: 343-60.

Scoular, J. 2004 'The 'subject' of prostitution: Interpreting the discursive, symbolic and

material position of sex/work in feminist theory', *Feminist Theory* 5(3): 343-55.

Sedgman, J. 2004 'Sex work more attractive option for students', *The World Today*, ABC. April.

Smith, N.J. 2012 'Body issues: The political economy of male sex work', *Sexualities* 15: 586-603.

Student Union Nottingham 2014 *Policy File Student Union Nottingham* http://www.su.nottingham.ac.uk/pageassets/make-the-change/democracy/policylawsadmin/Policy-File-website-311014.pdf (accessed May 2014)

Vanwesenbeeck, I. 2001 'Another decade of social scientific work on sex work: a review of research 1990-2000', *Annual Review of Sex Research* 12: 242-89.

Weitzer, R. (a) ed. 2010 *Sex For Sale (2nd edition): Prostitution, Pornography and the Sex Industry.* London: Routledge.

Weitzer, R. (b) 2010 'The mythology of prostitution: Advocacy research and public policy', *Sexual Research and Social Policy* 7: 15-29.

Whitaker. M. 2001 *Actuality at school*. BBC Radio 4, June 24.

Table I. Component loadings for all items included in the PCA

	Financial/practical reasons	Intrinsic reasons
To fund higher education	**.574**	-.396
To fund my lifestyle	**.494**	-.093
I couldn't get another job	**.473**	-.335
The hours suited my studies	**.580**	-.016
I wanted to work in adult entertainment/sex work	.382	**.716**
I thought I would enjoy the work	.452	**.695**
I was curious about working in the industry	.509	**.582**
Sexual pleasure	.337	**.452**
To cover my basic living expenses	**.660**	-.365
To gain experiences and skills	**.529**	.356
To avoid getting into debt	**.646**	-.458
To maintain contact with the world of work	**.479**	.012
To reduce the amount of money owed at the end of my course	**.668**	-.377

Table II. Participation of students in the sex industry[a] and χ^2 tests

		Gender		Age	
	All	Male	Female	Under 27	Over 26
Prostitution	57	18	24	30	12
Escorting	58	18	28	34	12
Selling sexual services (i)	58	19	28	35	13
Selling sexual services (ii)	11	5	5	7	2
Selling sexual services (iii)	17	7	6	7	6
Dominant/submissive	29	9	14	13	11
Total N Direct sex work	**134** (2.0%)	**48** (2.4%)	**55** (1.3%)**	**75** (1.4%)	**26** (4.6%)***
Porn acting	30	14	9	15	9
Selling sex on chat phone lines	28	4	16	14	6
Selling sexual services (iv)	66	16	41	52	3
Erotic dancing (v)	77	14	38	41	11
Stripping	61	18	25	37	7
Glamour modelling	68	9	39	39	11
Naked butler	47	24	5	25	5
Total N Indirect sex work	**256** (3.8%)	**72** (3.5%)	**114** (2.7%)	**153** (2.8%)	**34** (6.0%)***
Escort agency manager	6	3	2	3	2
Pimp	9	5	1	3	4
Madam/manager (vi)	7	2	3	1	2
Driver for sex workers	11	7	1	5	3
Receptionist (vii)	14	5	8	4	7
Total N Organisational/auxiliary roles	**32** (0.5%)	**16** (0.8%)	**9** (0.2%)**	**12** (0.2%)	**11** (1.9%)***
TOTAL N working in the sex industry	**326** (4.8%)	**101** (5.0%)	**140** (3.4%)**	**191** (3.5%)	**48** (8.5%)***
Total N respondents	**6773**	**2036**	**4172**	**5449**	**566**

a: for frequencies of <10 no percentages were included);
i: Selling sexual services independently;
ii: Selling sexual services on the streets;
iii: Selling sexual services in a brothel, sauna or massage parlour;
iv: Selling sexual services on the internet/webcam;
v: Erotic dancing including lap dancing, pole dancing;

vi: Madam or manager in a brothel, sauna or massage parlour;
vii: Receptionist in a brothel, sauna or massage parlour;
*** p<.01; *** p<.001*

Table III. Motivations for working in the sex industry

	All sex workers N (%)	**Direct sex work N (%)**	**Indirect sex work N (%)**	**X^2 (df = 1)**
Financial reasons				
To fund my lifestyle	155 (63.5%)	72 (68.6%)	83 (59.7%)	2.026
To fund higher education	141 (56.9%)	64 (58.7%)	77 (55.4%)	0.275
To cover my basic living expenses	134 (56.3%)	65 (63.1%)	69 (51.1%)	3.417
To avoid getting into debt	106 (45.1%)	46 (45.5%)	60 (44.8%)	0.014
To reduce debt at the end of the course	92 (39.3%)	39 (38.6%)	53 (39.8%)	0.037
Intrinsic reasons				
I thought I would enjoy the work	141 (59.0%)	57 (56.4%)	84 (60.9%)	0.474
I was curious about working in the industry	128 (53.8%)	53 (51.5%)	75 (55.6%)	0.395
I wanted to work in the industry	102 (43.6%)	46 (46.0%)	56 (41.8%)	0.413
Sexual pleasure	104 (43.5%)	55 (53.4%)	49 (36.0%)	7.193**
To gain experiences and skills	64 (27.1%)	27 (26.5%)	37 (27.6%)	0.038
To maintain contact with the world of work	29 (12.4%)	13 (13.0%)	16 (12.0%)	0.049
Practical reasons				
The hours suited my studies	135 (56.3%)	65 (63.7%)	70 (50.7%)	4.028*
I couldn't get another job	90 (37.7%)	44 (42.7%)	46 (33.8%)	1.975
I had friends who worked in the industry	46 (19.2%)	22 (21.2%)	24 (17.6%)	0.468

Force				
I felt forced to	34 (14.3%)	17 (16.8%)	17 (12.5%)	0.885
Total N (who filled in the question)	**233-248**	**100-109**	**133-139**	

* p<.05; ** p<.01

Table IV. Positive elements of working in the sex industry and Spearman Rho correlations with motivational fac

	All sex workers (%)	**Direct sex work (%)**	**Indirect sex work (%)**	**X^2 (df = 1)**	**Force**	**Financial and practical**	**Int**
Good money	82.7%	92.1%	74.8%	11.429**	.005	.262***	.
Flexible hours	76.8%	80.2%	73.9%	1.198	-.121	.294***	.
Sexual pleasure	46.4%	58.4%	36.1%	10.907**	-.048	-.055	.43
Good clients	39.1%	42.6%	36.1%	0.952	-.099	.042	.
Working conditions	38.2%	30.7%	44.5%	4.437*	-.124	-.030	.18
Freedom from employment regulations	37.3%	37.6%	37.0%	0.010	.087	.155*	.18
Relationship with colleagues	16.4%	12.9%	19.3%	1.664	-.027	-.020	.
Total N	**220**	**101**	**119**				

* p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001

Table V. Negative elements of working in the sex industry and Spearman Rho correlations with motivational fac

	All sex workers (%)	**Direct sex work (%)**	**Indirect sex work (%)**	**X^2 (df = 1)**	**Force**	**Financial and practical**	**Int**
Secrecy	50.7%	50.5%	50.9%	0.004	.048	.147*	-.
Unpredictable earnings	50.2%	52.5%	48.2%	0.388	-.064	.101	.
Unpleasant customers	49.8%	53.5%	46.4%	1.062	.024	.092	.
Fear of violence	36.0%	48.5%	24.5%	13.127***	.171*	.069	-.
Negative judgement from friends or family	34.6%	27.7%	40.9%	4.046*	-.019	.164*	.
My view of sex has changed	25.1%	33.7%	17.3%	7.521**	.065	-.013	-.
Sexual exploitation	25.1%	25.7%	24.5%	0.040	.243**	.168*	-.
Lack of employment rights	21.8%	24.8%	19.1%	0.990	.216**	.138	-.
Negative effect on my self-esteem	21.8%	26.7%	17.3%	2.764	.277***	.029	-.
Competition with other sex workers	20.9%	21.8%	20.0%	0.101	.140*	.184*	.
Total N	**211**	**101**	**110**				

* p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.00