Digital sex markets: Entrepreneurialism and consumption within an uncertain regulatory framework

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Abstract

Digital technologies have transformed sex markets in at least two notable ways: first, through the emergence of new digital modalities of sex work, such as webcamming; second, through the ability to purchase erotic/sexual exchanges at any time, and almost anywhere. As a fairly recent development there is limited research on how digital modalities of sex work are being organised, consumed and produced. This study contributes to the understanding of these new forms of digital economy, questioning how they are made sense of and negotiated by digital sex workers and customers.

I have approached this study using mixed-methods, drawing on multiple online and offline sources. These include online ethnographic observations, 33 interviews with customers and workers, digital documentary analysis, an online survey with customers and data-mining from a leading sex work platform.

The key findings in this thesis reveal tensions in how the market is understood by customers and workers, and society more broadly. I argue that the market is legitimised yet the labour remains stigmatised. The first key finding points to evidence of economic legitimation of digital sex markets, normalisation in the technological architecture and processes of differentiation from ‘illegal’ sex markets. Yet, the second key finding points to a tension in the accounts of workers and customers who express varying degrees of stigma and emotional and social risks that require everyday management. The third finding relates to the uncertain regulatory framework. There are no specific formal laws regarding digital sex markets, but I argue they are regulated by state laws in conjunction with platform governance and self-governance of workers and customers.

This study extends debates on platform-managed labour by using a sex work lens to explore the role of gender and sexuality in labour processes in the digital age, thereby, capturing the diversity of labour markets dynamically transformed by the Internet. The study, therefore, speaks more broadly to debates on digital governance, digital labour, and sexual labour politics.
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Chapter One: Introduction

We are currently living in what is commonly described as the digital age, changing the way we communicate, consume and work. The digital age is distinguished by transformations in technology, creating new ways to mediate communication and encounters with one another (Baym, 2011). It emerged in the mid-1990s with the production and consumption of mobile phones and the mainstream use of the Internet for online shopping and file sharing (Lehdonvirta, 2012). Since the mid-2000s, the development of so-called ‘web 2.0’ has changed the way users of the Internet engage with websites and platforms. Individuals can easily take, edit, upload and share digital texts, photographs and films, thus producing content becoming what has been coined ‘prosumers’ (Toffler, 1980; Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010). In the digital age there are numerous ways to communicate with another person, adding to face-to-face communication, landline telephones and postal mail. People can also connect with another person using emails, text messages, instant messages, chat boards, voice notes, video calls, mobile phone calls and more (Baym, 2011). These technological developments, alongside ‘mutually-reinforcing’ economic and political factors, have fundamentally changed the nature of work (Huws, 2013: 1).

Developments in communication technologies have also transformed sex markets in at least three notable ways: first, through the emergence of new digital modalities of sex work, such as webcamming and exchanging erotic content through messaging services such as Snapchat. Second, the ability to purchase sexual/erotic exchanges with another person has extended to any time, almost anywhere, and is available at a relatively low-cost to the customer. Third, facilitating the expansion and diversification of sex markets are sex work platforms, which have emerged as an integral market device to digital sex markets, acting as intermediaries between sex workers and their customers or clients. This has been dubbed the ‘platformization’ of sex work by Niels Van Doorn and Olav Velthuis (2018:3). Like other
digital platforms that facilitate labour between workers and customers, such as Uber and Task Rabbit, sex work platforms charge workers a transaction fee based on a percentage of the payment made by the customer for the service.

These digital transformations have not been addressed specifically in UK laws and policies relating to sex work (Scoular, 2010; Sanders et al. 2018b; Scoular et al., 2019). Rather, digital sex markets are regulated under various and related, but not direct state laws and policies. Thus, digital sex markets operate in an uncertain regulatory framework. In this way, the regulatory space remains uncertain leaving room for sex work platforms to operate according to their own rules and practices and to have a significant role in the governance of digital sex markets thus notably impacting on the working lives of digital sex workers.

Related to the policy and laws surrounding digital sex markets is also the historical and enduring stigma associated with commercial sex which can lead to forms of social exclusion for sex workers. The construction of those who sell sex as morally and sexually ‘Other’ is maintained and reinforced by formal laws. In England, Wales and Scotland, selling sex between two consenting adults is legal, but many activities surrounding the sale of sex are criminalised, such as running a brothel (which includes two sex workers operating from the same premises) and ‘loitering’ with the intent to sell sex (Scoular and O’Neill, 2007; Phoenix, 2017; Sanders et al., 2018a). While laws and policies surrounding sex work play a role in marginalising sex workers as ‘Other’, the stigma associated with commercial sex that can lead to such forms of social exclusion is highly complex, as social institutions, cultural understandings and religious morality combine with formal laws and legal practices to produce and reproduce stigma (Rubin, 1984). The Madonna/whore dichotomy that values the former and treats the latter as an object has roots in Judeo-Christian traditions and operates as a form of social control of women, creating distance between ‘respectable’ female bodies and the ‘female whore’ (Rubin, 1984; Pheterson, 1996; O’Connell Davidson, 1998; Nussbaum,
2004; Agustín, 2007; Bernstein, 2007b; Phoenix, 2018). ‘Whore stigma’ is gendered female (Pheterson, 1996: 48) and regulates the behaviour of all women through the dichotomy that positions it as opposite to acceptable, domestic, dutiful womanhood. As well as being gendered, ‘whore stigma’ is also raced and classed, rendering it more easily resisted, or more deeply felt, depending on the context of the sex market and the intersecting identities of the sex worker (O’Connell Davidson, 1998; Koken et al., 2014; Sanders et al., 2017; Phoenix, 2018). In other words, the effect of ‘whore stigma’ depends on differences to do with place, citizenship, gender, sexuality, class, race, ethnicity and time – as a social construct stigma is not a static condition but a process with the potential to change (Hammond and Kingston, 2014; Weitzer, 2018; Sanders, 2018).

1.1: Aims and background of the study

The aim of the study is to consider the construction, structures and operations of digital sex markets. This is carried out through an analysis of the architecture of digital technology, the uncertain regulatory framework surrounding digital sex markets, consumption and production patterns and behaviours, the ways these structures, factors and practices impact on the working lives of digital sex workers and how the latter and their customers negotiate the new digital environment.

In addressing this aim, I am interested in three further factors:

1. What are the continuities and changes to sex markets in the digital age in relation to the economic organisation of sex markets, consumption practices and behaviour, and labour processes?

2. What role do platforms have in the regulation, economic organisation, production and consumption of digitally-mediated sexual services?
3. How can we understand how the enduring and historical stigma associated with commercial sex is experienced in the new context of digital sex markets?

This study has developed from a broader interest in global sex markets, and the framing of sex workers as victims as part of the modern-day anti-slavery movement, following a period working in Cambodia with an NGO that sought to support women facing abuse, including those exploited in ‘sex slavery’. The modern-day anti-slavery movement has been critiqued by scholars as lacking nuance in their liberal and simplistic construction of the dichotomy between free labour and slavery (O’Connell Davidson, 2006, 2013; Cruz, 2018). Through this simplification, the modern slavery movement and anti-trafficking discourses seem to deny the possibility of sexual agency for women involved in sex markets. Furthermore, there is a lack of acknowledgement of the extreme inequalities seen in the global economy, grounded in imperialism, postcolonialism and capitalism that are fundamental to global sex markets (Kempadoo, 2001, 2015). Anti-trafficking discourses stem from radical feminist approaches to prostitution of the 1970s that framed sex workers as victims of male violence (Kempadoo, 2001). Critical of the victim label produced by these discourses, I wanted to understand the motivations and contexts experienced by women who ‘choose’ to sell sex. I use the notion of ‘choice’ with caution, and do not deny that some women are forced and coerced into sexual labour, nor as Wendy Chapkis (1997: 67) argues, is it necessarily ‘free choice’ absent from any constraints, but choosing to sell sex can be a ‘rational’ economic choice within limited employment options. Without overstating the rationality of choice, I follow the Weberian idea of structure and agency; that is, individuals consciously choose a path based on the choices available to them and the meanings they to attach to them, which is bound up in capitalism and other institutions (Weber, 1968). Following this position, I frame sexual labour as a form of work, by doing this I am able to
recognise when harm and exploitation may exist. Therefore, at ‘the heart of the sex-work nexus’ is an understanding of structure and agency (Kingston and Sanders, 2010: 4).

I owe much to the empirical studies and critical theoretical work by sex work scholars who have shown that sex work is a form of labour that involves diverse labour practices and processes, organised and regulated in many ways, and that agency, like consent, is an ongoing process, rather than a one-off event in the working lives of sex workers (McLeod, 1982; Agustín, 2007; Bernstein, 2007b; Selmi, 2013; Sanders and Hardy, 2014; Sanders et al., 2018a; O’Connell Davidson, 1998, 2014). These studies have shown that, as sex work scholars, we can remain critical of neoliberal capitalism, patriarchy and colonialism which create and maintain intersectional inequalities in which global sex markets are produced, while enquiring into the everyday working lives of sex workers and seeking to identify and recognise where poor labour conditions and exploitation exist.

Initially, I embarked on a feasibility study looking at the market of erotic phone calls, as a form of ‘virtual’ sex work, as I was interested to understand a ‘legal’ and apparently less maligned sex market (Weitzer, 2010) that was not embroiled in the discourses of anti-trafficking and was located in my country of birth. It soon became apparent that the Internet or digital age, was also transforming the production and consumption of commercial sex and that a study exploring how, and in what ways, these changes were taking place would be forward looking and a break away from research on the anti-trafficking discourse and on more established sex markets (Bernstein, 2007b; Döring, 2009; Sanders, 2010; Feldman, 2014; Jones, 2015a; Pettinger, 2015; Sanders et al., 2016). It is within this context that this thesis explores the degrees of stigma amongst those who engage in digital sex markets as customers and workers and shows that further analysis is required in regard to how digital transformations have complicated the stigmatisation of those who are involved in sex markets.
1.2: Definitions and concepts in context

It is not possible to talk about sex work as a singular and monolithic activity, as it takes many forms and involves diverse and numerous workers, consumers and organisations that form a global sex market (Agustín, 2007; Weitzer, 2010; Brents and Sanders, 2010; Phoenix, 2017). Sex work may involve direct physical contact between buyers and sellers (prostitution, escorting), as well as indirect services where the bodies of the buyers and sellers do not touch (stripping, erotic phone calls, webcam shows, pornography) (Weitzer, 2010). Furthermore, the organisation and regulation of sex work takes many forms. For instance, and in relation to digital sex work specifically, webcamming is largely unregulated in most European countries, yet in the Philippines it is criminalised. The term sex markets reflects the plurality of the work entailed, the services purchased and the organisations that manage the markets.

In this thesis, I use the term digital sex markets to include all forms of sexual services which are organised through the Internet. Although this definition also covers direct/offline sexual services organised through the Internet (escorting), the main focus of this analysis is centred on digitally-mediated sexual services, which refer to indirect services that remotely connect sex workers and their customers through technological devices such as computers, laptops and smartphones.

The primary aim of the research is to focus on digitally-mediated forms of sex work. However, digital communication technologies have become such an embedded part of our everyday lives that a distinction between the ‘virtual’ and the ‘real’ no longer reflects the centrality of technology in how we present and understand ourselves. Similarly, digital sex workers and their customers do not operate in distinct spheres of online and offline, as there is fluidity between these spheres, not only in terms of services offered, but also in regard to the experience. When online we are in both spaces, online and offline, we are not limited to being in the ‘real’ world or being in the ‘virtual’ world. We can connect with a person
‘virtually’ whilst remaining present in our physical space, therefore, creating a distinct boundary between online/offline, virtual/real would be artificial rather than reflective of the lived experiences of those who produce, consume and work in digital sex markets. This thesis focusses on interactions between workers and customers mediated by digital technology; therefore, this thesis does not include pornography in its analysis but acknowledges that from the consumers’ and workers perspective the markets are intertwined, as the data reveals.

Digitally-mediated sexual services are a form of ‘digital labour’ defined by Ursula Huws as ‘labour, whether paid or unpaid, that is carried out using a combination of digital and telecommunications technologies and/or produces content for digital media’ (2012: 3). This definition is broad but it encompasses the reality for the majority of the digital sex workers in my study. Their labour is not always paid, and may involve work carried out using communication technologies and producing online content. Within this broad definition of digital labour is the more precise definition of platform-managed labour, defined by Huws et al. as ‘paid work organised by online platforms acting as intermediaries between workers and their employer or clients’ (2018: 115). This definition incorporates work organised via platforms that takes place offline as well as online. This reflects how sex work platforms organise sexual services online and offline, such as direct sex services, known by participants as escorting services, digitally-mediated services and the sale of goods, such as underwear and sex toys. There are no official statistics on the number of people engaged in platform-managed labour, but research suggests 11 per cent of online adults in the UK aged 16-75 (5 million people) are being paid via platforms (Huws and Joyce, 2016). It is predicted that this form of labour organisation will continue to grow, potentially adding $2.7 trillion to global GDP by 2025 (Dobbs et al., 2015). These statistics are yet to connect this dynamic area of labour organisation with sex work and does not currently include those selling their sexual labour on sex work platforms. I have argued (Rand, in print) that including sex work in
digital labour discussions would go some way to recognise when sex, sexuality and gender are part of the codes, processes and practices of digital labour.

Like digital labour, sex work is not captured by official labour market statistics because these forms of income-generating activities are not included in standard employment relations (O’Connell Davidson, 2014; Sanders et al., 2017b; Huws et al., 2018). Traditionally, it has been difficult to be precise about the numbers of those who engage in sex markets as workers because of ‘hidden’ nature of the population (Shaver, 2005; Sanders, 2006; Cusick et al., 2009). The advance of digital communication technologies means digital sex workers are not as ‘hidden’ as offline sex workers because their profiles are publicly accessible online. There does remain, however, limitations to calculating the number of digital sex workers. Simply counting online profiles is problematic because of the room for error due to double profiles, fake profiles, inactive profiles and sex workers advertising across platforms (Sanders et al., 2017b; Sanders et al., 2018b). Furthermore, digital sex markets are global so it is hard to assert the boundaries of UK markets. Digital sex markets are dynamic and ever-changing, therefore, estimating the number of platforms, profiles and/or workers/customers is a snapshot, a moment in time, rather than a precise number.

Combining the definitions from sex work scholars and digital labour scholars, I refer to those who participated in my study as digital sex workers. Their labour is both paid and unpaid, and organised by platforms who act as intermediaries. Their labour may include content production, the sale of goods, digitally-mediated services and/or ‘escorting’ services. Therefore, the participants in this study are defined as digital sex workers who participate in platform-managed labour. By drawing on terms from digital labour scholarship, my study incorporates sex work into wider labour policy and academic discussions because selling sexual labour can and should be understood as ‘work’, and this work involves not only the
direct selling of ‘sex’ itself but also of various indirect sexual or sexualised services and activities (Kingston and Sanders, 2010).

A number of jobs involve sexualised forms of labour that may not necessarily be straightforwardly categorised as ‘sex work’, but are connected to sex markets. Melissa Tyler’s (2012) research with Soho sex shop staff, for example, suggests that their labour requires the performance of ‘implicit’ forms of sexualised labour and necessitates careful management of the stigma and taint of ‘dirty work’ associated with commercial sex, yet is not directly selling a sexual/erotic encounter. Outside of sex markets, Lisa Adkins (1995) and Chris Warhurst and Dennis Nickson (2009) have shown that women employ sexualised labour as part of their daily working experiences to sell products, ideas and lifestyles. Laura Harvey and Rosalind Gill, in their theorisation of postfeminism, argue that women are compelled in neoliberalism to engage in a sexual entrepreneurialism, even in their private lives. Women are ‘compulsorily sexy and always “up for it”, and is interpellated through discourses in which sex is work that requires constant labour and reskilling’ (2011: 56). I propose that digital sexual labour takes place within the nexus of sexualised labour, sex as work and sexual entrepreneurialism.

By bringing supply and demand together in my analysis, I aim to consider how the behaviours of customers might influence the behaviours of workers. It is not possible to fully understand digital sex markets without considering both production and consumption of digitally-mediated sex services. Furthermore, literature on consumption has recognised that production and consumption are not always distinct activities and in the digital age the boundaries are increasingly blurred (Ritzer, 1998; Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010; Pettinger, 2011, 2016). My study draws on the work of Lynne Pettinger (2011), who frames those who buy sex as customers of service work. By doing this, both Pettinger and I are able to frame customers as part of a wider consumer society and draw on consumption theory to theorise
their activities and behaviours, in particular ‘customer sovereignty’ (Korczynski, 2013: 31). I understand this concept to be based on the myth of a rational consumer who has relational superiority; a myth that must be maintained in the economic market transaction through the skill of the service worker (Korczynski and Ott, 2004; 2006). I adopt Gayle Rubin’s (1984) stance in that sexual ethics should be based on consent and consideration of the other, rather than conforming to a single standard of heterosexual monogamy. By doing so, my study does not assume ‘deviant’ sexual behaviour, as Catharine MacKinnon (1999) and others do, but rather seeks to frame buying digital sexual services within a broader theoretical understanding of digital consumption in neoliberal Britain. The gendered power relations of sex work have been explored thoroughly elsewhere (see Pateman, 1988; O’Connell Davidson, 1998; Coy, 2012; Hardy, 2013), and without denying the gendered nature of sex markets, I analyse digital sex markets not in isolation, but as part of broader gendered, sexualised, raced consumer culture. Throughout this thesis I refer to those who buy digitally-mediated sexual services, as customers of a service. I acknowledge this is a departure from other sex work literature that tends to describe those who buy sex as ‘clients’ (for example, Sanders, 2008a; Weitzer, 2010), but I seek to frame digital sex markets as digital customer service markets.

The demand for digitally-mediated sexual services in Britain is unknown. Through data analytics, it is possible to know how many visitors sex work platforms attract, but this data does not reveal if the visitors buy services, and if they do, what services they buy. Further this data does not represent unique visitors to the platforms. There is more robust data on those who buy direct sexual services. The 2010-2012 British National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (Natsal-3) reports 11 per cent of men in the survey have purchased sex (Jones et al., 2014). It should be noted that based on gendered assumptions, only men were asked in the survey if they purchased sex. Respondents were not asked about purchasing
digitally-mediated forms of sexual services, and therefore the data does not speak directly to this study. The market for digitally-mediated forms of sex work falls within a spectrum between buying direct forms of sexual services and watching pornography. Although purchasing sex may only be taken up by a minority of men, watching pornography, however, is widely understood as a mainstream activity. According to Alexa, a web analytics database, Pornhub is in the top twenty most visited websites in Britain, suggesting watching porn online is commonplace (Alexa, 2019).

This thesis adds to the small-scale qualitative studies that focus on sex markets outside of ‘prostitution’ as part of consumer capitalism (for instance Hardy et al., 2010). I argue in this thesis that the late capitalist, neoliberal political economy is the economic, cultural and political foundation for women (and men) to use the market to manage economic risks that have increased and have been transferred to the individual due to welfare reductionism, deregulation of labour markets and an unswerving promotion of meritocracy. I show that inequalities based on identities such as gender, race, class and sexuality continue to inform the working lives of so many, including sex workers. Therefore, I am not critical of those operating in sex markets as workers/consumers, as this individualises and can personalise analysis of sex markets. Sex workers have continued to argue that,

Speaking about sex work as work means speaking about precarious and exploited work in times of austerity, war and the increasing criminalisation of people’s movement. It also means speaking about resistance, and about acknowledging our own relative locations, privileges, and inequalities. That might be why for many of us it is not easy to listen (Garofalo-Geymonat and Macioti, 2016: The failure of ‘anti-trafficking’, para. 20).

This thesis is simultaneously critical of the late capitalist, neoliberal political economy while remaining respectful of the decisions people make within this system.
1.3: Conceptual framework

This thesis is presented in a manner that draws on economic sociology inspired by the science and technology literature (Callon and Muniesa, 2005; Callon, 2007; Callon et al., 2007; Çalışkan and Callon, 2010). In the context of this body of work, markets are defined as ‘a set of significations, realities and practices whose content and expected outcome has become a matter of widespread agreement’ (Çalışkan and Callon, 2010: 3). Markets are always economic but are also social, technological, material and legal (McFall, 2009; Pettinger, 2015) and are constructed through a number of market devices, which are ‘the material and discursive assemblages that intervene in the construction of markets’ (Callon et al., 2007: 2).

This study analyses the market devices that inform the economic exchange between customers and workers. In this context, agency is not placed solely with the workers or the customers, but rather I recognise that agency is evolving and intricate and individual choices are effected by the technological, legal, material, social and economic aspects of markets (Callon et al., 2007). Using this economic sociology approach to frame the analysis chapters means I have explored digital sex markets through market devices, allowing the analysis to move between fields. For example, I show the prices set by sex workers are not based solely on their judgement, but are influenced by technology, market competition, moral economies and consumers and that the agency of workers and customers are spatial and temporal, and effected by technical and discursive devices (McFall, 2009).

Pettinger, (2015) and Van Doorn and Velthius, (2018) have also drawn on this framework to make sense of increasingly complex sex markets in the digital age. Structuring this study in this way responds to Pettinger’s call to ‘explore commercial sex not purely as encounter between male and female strangers in abject places, but as an organised and rather mundane activity’ (2015: 141). Taking this approach to understand the complexities of digital sex markets moves away from an over-focus on specific actors in sex markets. Focussing on
one aspect of sex markets can lend itself to finding fault or deviancy in specific groups of people, potentially essentialising the construction of markets to individual people, rather than looking at the assemblage of market devices that influence the actions and behaviours of customers and workers. For instance, there has been an over emphasis on looking for the deviancy in customers, or the fragility of sex workers (for example, Coy et al., 2012).

One of the strengths of this study is that I used different analytical approaches to understand different market devices that organise digital sex market encounters. In Chapter Four, I describe the technical organisation of digital sex markets through a lens of science and technology literature, highlighting that ‘choices’ of workers and customers are influenced by technical devices, and thus impact the construction and operation of markets. In Chapter Five, I draw on Foucault’s notion of governmentality to analyse the role of the law in forming norms and values regarding digital sex markets. In Chapter Six, I use consumption theory to understand the customers of digital sex markets, framing them as customers of a service, and in Chapter Seven I utilise a sex work lens to understand the intricacies and complexities of working in a stigmatised occupation.

1.4: Thesis structure

The thesis is structured in the following way.

Chapter Two positions the research in the existing literature that considers the intersection of labour, technology and sex, highlighting where the study extends debates and theories, as well as where it adds to knowledge on digital sex markets. The complexities of sex markets in the digital age are only just beginning to be unpacked in academic and policy discussions, as this is still a relatively new area of research. In particular, the literature review conceptualises the ‘sexual entrepreneur’ within the gender dynamics of neoliberalism, and draws on theories of consumption to make sense of the marketisation of sex and intimacy in
the digital age. Digital labour literature is also reviewed to reveal current trends in the labour market. Finally, the literature review highlights some of the new areas of debates regarding ethical online research.

My ethical approach, grounded in feminist ideas, is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three. The chapter provides an account of the methodology that has shaped this thesis and consists of explaining my position as a feminist researcher. In addition, I present the chosen multi-method, online and offline research approach taken, including the initial research design and the ongoing developments. This chapter also includes a discussion of the challenges and limitations of the study and concludes with a reflexive account of the study and my experience as a sex work researcher.

The fourth chapter is a contextual chapter and thus provides details on the ‘platformisation’ of sex markets and the modalities of digitally-mediated sex work. It concentrates on the technical devices of digital sex markets, the influence of so-called ‘web 2.0’ and the associated technologies that have given rise to an increasingly interactive online space, where people take on the role of consumer and producer, engaging in ‘free labour’ as a leisure activity that also drives profits for platforms.

The fifth chapter of the thesis presents and analyses the legal framework that indirectly, and directly, influences the behaviours of producers/workers and customers. In this chapter I identify the uncertainty of digital governance and acknowledge that the ‘neglect’ of formal law has created an uncertain regulatory space that has, in many ways, allowed platforms to make their own rules (and get away with it). In addition, I reflect on the recent amendment to law in the USA, the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (SESTA) and Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (FOSTA) that has essentially criminalised advertising and facilitating ‘prostitution’ online and consider the impact of regulations that increase surveillance but do not protect sex workers from violence and abuse.
Chapter six analyses the demand for digital sex markets, situating the market alongside other traditional (prostitution, pornography) and new (online pornography and online dating) sex markets. In this chapter I argue that customers have a conflicted sense of self that is produced by a consumer society that promotes sexual consumption through accessible digital sex markets whilst simultaneously responsibilises individuals to acknowledge their own morality.

The seventh chapter brings together the assemblage of the market to understand how the market devices shape the working lives of sex workers, analysing to what extent digital sex workers are in control of their labour processes. This chapter frames digital sex workers as sexual entrepreneurs who engage in this form of labour in the ‘mode of an entrepreneur’ (Brown, 2015: 31), that is optimistic, self-responsible and innovative, but also precarious. I argue that this can make identifying and managing social risks associated with sex work an individualised problem.

The final chapter concludes the thesis, restating and answering the research questions stated above. I also discuss the implications of this research in regard to policy and further research.

I complete four tasks in this thesis:

1. I acknowledge the uncertainty of the current regulatory framework. Through this process, I identify the formal law’s neglect of digital sex markets has played a role in legitimising digitally-mediated sex work while delegitimising other forms of commercial sex.

2. I analyse critically the role of platforms in the economic organisation and regulatory framework of digital sex markets.

3. I situate the demand for digital sex markets in relation to other sex markets and analyse customers’ interactions with sex workers.
4. I reflect on how the changes in technology have impacted on the working lives of digital sex workers, in relation to their motivations and trajectories, approaches to work, and how they manage economic and social risks.
Chapter Two: Literature review

2.1: Introduction

The following literature review provides comprehensive coverage of the existing literature that considers the intersection of labour, technology and sex, highlighting where the study extends current debates and theories, as well as where it adds to current knowledge on digital sex markets. This is still a relatively new area of research and this is the first study to take into consideration the economic organisation, technological architecture and regulatory framework that shapes the production and consumption of digital sex markets in the UK. The study is timely as digital governance regarding labour, online content and digital consumption has become a more central focus of government debates.

The study particularly draws on the work, and builds upon, the research of Teela Sanders, Rosie Campbell and Jane Scoular as leading scholars of contemporary sex markets in the UK. In addition, Ursula Huws’ research on digital labour has been invaluable as I seek to bring together two bodies of research: digital labour and sexual labour. Furthermore, the theorisation of neoliberalism by Rosalind Gill has provided the contextual framework in which this study is located. Also, as stated in the introduction, Michel Callon’s concept of market devices is used to structure the analysis of the findings.

This literature review firstly conceptualises neoliberalism, as it is a central concept to several arguments in this thesis. Drawing on the work of feminist political economists, I argue that traditional gender roles and responsibilities are exploited in neoliberal capitalist Britain, particularly through austerity measures, and that part of the contemporary neoliberal agenda serves to maintain the male breadwinner bias and promote women’s ‘caring’ responsibilities. Alongside this, is the valorisation of entrepreneurship; women are able to engage in flexible, homeworking, sometimes digital, enterprising opportunities and still fulfil
their ‘caring’ responsibilities. The study looks at the ‘moral’ limits of entrepreneurship, and unpacks the tensions apparent when entrepreneurship is based on a form of sexual labour.

Leading on from this, I contextualise these tensions in a so-called ‘sexualised’ society. In the UK, there have been significant changes in attitudes to sex and relationships, which have made sex ‘the big story’ (Plummer, 1995: 4). The neoliberal ideology of marketisation has expanded to include sex, intimacy and relationships. In a consumer society, where consumption is central to the economy, cultural production and our very sense of self, some forms of sexual consumption have become commonplace, even ‘mainstream’. However, like entrepreneurship, there are ‘moral’ limits to sexual consumption, linked to notions of ‘respectability’ and class.

Moving on from the cultural and socio-economic context of this study, I review the literature that has considered the impact of digital communication technologies on sex markets. Here, I present studies on digitally-mediated forms of sex work, and those that consider the impact of the Internet on the overall organisation of sex markets, and, therefore, the experiences of sex workers and customers. Following this is a discussion on the regulation of sex work in the digital age, bringing together literature from sex work researchers and studies on digital governance. This leads to a critical enquiry into researchers’ use of the concept of stigma, as an almost defining feature of sex work. Although still useful, I question the oversimplification of the concept and frame it as a dynamic social process, rather than a static, defining attribute.

In the final sections I acknowledge and present broader feminist debates regarding sex work, highlighting how my study adds to the body of work that shows the heterogeneous nature of sex work, in regard to the diversity of those engaged in sex markets as workers and customers, as well as sites of work and range of services. I conclude by summarising the gaps in the literature identified in this review and how this study responds.
2.2: Neoliberalism: Gendered entrepreneurship

This study adds to the scholarship that draws on neoliberalism, as a conceptual tool, to understand sex markets in late capitalism. Neoliberalism as economic and political policies, can be marked by free markets, free trade and deregulation of labour markets (Harvey, 2005; Gilbert, 2013). In the UK, neoliberalism took hold through the period of Thatcherism in the 1980s and early 1990s and has morphed and continued through New Labour governments, and successive Conservative governments (Littler, 2013), as well as taking hold in most of Western Europe, and elsewhere (Gill and Harvey, 2018). Neoliberalism, as a set of practices and processes, is dynamic, flexible and ‘mobile technology’ (Ong, 2006: 3) that is able to adapt to different geographical and political contexts. The resilience of neoliberalism through the global financial crisis of 2008 has been, in part, due to the neoliberal mode of governmentality that influences all aspects of everyday life.

I understand neoliberalism to be a dominant political rationality that not only works through government polices but also disseminates the market model through all aspects of life (Harvey, 2005; Gill, 2014; Brown, 2015). It produces subjects who are enterprising, hard-working and self-investing, and assumed to be totally responsible for their own economic, social and mental wellbeing. Gilbert defines neoliberalism at its inception, as ‘a programme of deliberate intervention by government in order to encourage particular types of entrepreneurial, competitive and commercial behaviour in its citizens’ (2013: 9). Yet, it has been widely accepted that neoliberalism is more than economic and political policies, but an ethic in itself (Harvey, 2005; Gill, 2014). The widespread dissemination of neoliberal values of competition, individualism and meritocratic norms can be seen across diverse sites (Gilbert, 2013), such as self-help books and manuals (Gill, 2009), advertising (Gill, 2008), and mainstream television programmes such as The Apprentice (Couldry and Littler, 2011). It is the responsibility of the individual to strive, work hard and develop themselves to be the
‘ideal’ neoliberal agent (Gill and Schraff, 2011); ‘conducting life through an entrepreneurial spirit, the neoliberal self is hailed by rules that emphasize ambition, calculation, competition, self-optimization and personal responsibility’ (Barker et al., 2018: 8). As David Harvey argues, in a neoliberal political economy an individual’s wellbeing can be advanced by ‘liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms’ (2005: 3). However, when the enterprising individual is a sex worker, paradoxes transpire due to the continuum of a conservative ideology of gender and sexuality that seek to maintain the nuclear family (Marques, 2010; Cheng and Kim, 2014).

Neoliberal rhetoric promotes a meritocratic society – the market provides opportunities for every individual, as long as they have the enterprise and determination to seize the opportunities. However, this is problematised by a number of sociologists who point out that chances in a society based on market principles, have widened inequalities between the richest and the poorest, impacted by race, class, gender and other structural inequalities (Littler, 2013; Gill, 2014). Gill (2014) argues that neoliberalism denies structural inequalities because without doing so the neoliberal mythology of entrepreneurial individualism would be punctured. This denial becomes part of the mechanisms that reproduces inequality. Labour markets across all sectors continue to be racialised and gendered (Gill, 2014; Huws, 2016). Many economic and social policies of the British neoliberal government are gendered, located in normative ideals of sexuality and gender, reliant on the nuclear family and the male breadwinner bias (Littler, 2013; Schlager and Klatzer, 2014; Gill, 2014). Neoliberalism is tied into recent ‘austerity measures’ which rely on unpaid or low-paid, mainly female domestic labour to function. A significant part of the neoliberal project is placing the responsibility for childcare, those who are unwell and the elderly on women. Feminist political economists, such as Schlager and Klatzer (2014: 484), identify the specific gendered impact that cuts in public expenditure and the provision of public services have on women because it is often
women that increase their unpaid domestic work to supplement the gap in welfare provision. This has been conceptualised by Elson and Cagatay (2000: 1335) as the ‘commodification bias’. Women take on the burden of domestic care, often weakening their access to formal employment, or in more affluent households outsource the care, often to migrant women, therefore, exacerbating racialised, gendered, class inequalities as well as inequalities based on migration status.

The retraction of the welfare state means risk is individualised. In a welfarist context, the state takes responsibility for its citizens, providing protection from low pay, unemployment, sickness and old age. In a neoliberal context, risk is managed by the individual, as there is ‘no guarantee of security, protection, or even survival’ (Brown, 2015: 37). In his Collège de France lectures (1978-1979) Foucault discusses what the transfer of risk entails in neoliberalism:

[Neoliberalism] involves an individualization of social policy and individualization through social policy, instead of collectivization and socialization by and in social policy. In short, it does not involve providing individuals with a social cover for risks, but according everyone a sort of economic space within which they can take on and confront risks (2008: 144).

Women are particularly affected by the individualisation of risk as they are more likely to fall into poverty, as the exclusion from formal, full-time employment often results in less savings and accumulation of capital (properties and pensions) (Schlager and Klatzer, 2014). However, neoliberal ideology does not recognise these fundamental gendered inequalities, but rather proposes that the market is open to all, and it is the responsibility of the individual to be enterprising and productive, thus managing economic risk.

It is also important to point out that there are moral limits to the idealised enterprising neoliberal agent, as the case of sex work reveals. On the one hand, sex workers are the ‘quintessential entrepreneur’ (Marques, 2010: 324): self-responsible, hard-working, who
calculate how to engage in the market to strategise against risk. At the same time, sex work is considered outside the charmed circle of sexuality that hierarchises partnered heterosexual relationships with conventionally gendered roles above other forms of sexual identities and practices (Rubin, 1984) – a sexual framework that neoliberalism relies upon and reinforces. Thus, sexuality, and sex work as part of it, is subject to control through neoliberal ‘governmentality’. That is, the government of self and the government of state that work in conjunction to form ‘techniques and procedures for directing human behaviour’ (Foucault, 2008: 82), which also pertains to sexual life which needs to be conducted according to well-established norms and conventions. Neoliberal citizens are not governed solely by sovereign power, but ‘will govern themselves, master themselves, care for themselves’ (Rose and Miller, 2008 150). As defined by Foucault:

The ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security (2002: 102).

To make my argument, I focus on the a/morality of neoliberalism conceptualised by Cheng and Kim (2014) in their study on the intersection of migrant Korean sex workers’ enterprising endeavours, and the US state practices and responses. They argue that neoliberalism in the US facilitates a conservative moral agenda that seeks to maintain gender and sexual norms, in line with ‘relational heterosexuality and middle-class femininity’ (Bernstein, 2012; Cheng and Kim, 2014: 357), while paradoxically pursuing unparalleled marketisation of all aspects of life, including sex and intimacy. The historical ‘Othering’ of sex workers was (and still is) used to distinguish the sexual behaviour of women according to class and race (Rubin, 1984). The current British government claims that dealing with the ‘problem of prostitution’ is a step towards gender justice, while simultaneously adopting austerity measures that are known to
weaken women’s economic and social position in society. A recent report from the Conservative party presented the ‘problems’ of prostitution without discussing poverty or austerity (Mullin, 2019), clear evidence of the ‘state regulation of morality’ (Brown, 2006: 700), yet an amoral interest in the effects of poverty and inequalities.

It is the gendered impact of economic and political policies and the requirement of the neoliberal state to be self-optimising, self-sufficient, enterprising neoliberal subjects that produces the sexual entrepreneur. As Gill and Schraff (2011) argue, making money from the female body is pervasive in neoliberal late capitalism, and is not limited to commercial sex markets. Studies have shown there are various ways in which individuals profit from their sexual labour (Adkins, 1995; Warhurst and Nickson, 2009; Tyler, 2012; Wood, 2015; Barker et al., 2018); however, sex workers ‘embody the sexual limits of neoliberalism’ (Cheng and Kim, 2014: 357), and are therefore pushed to the margins of society, unless they are willing to accept the rehabilitation offered by the state (Scoular, 2010; Marques, 2010), or as I propose in my study, perform sexual entrepreneurship (Harvey and Gill, 2011), that is in line with neoliberal female sexual subjectivity, that is ‘white and middle class by default’ (Tasker and Negra, 2007: 3) and presumed to be heterosexual (Flood and Gill, forthcoming, quoted in Banet-Weiser et al., 2019).

Marques’ analysis of sex workers’ entrepreneurship in neoliberal Canada introduces a nuance important to this study, by suggesting some sex workers – those ‘who engage in “artistic” labour, such as exotic dancers, telephone sex workers and erotic masseuses’ (2010: 328) – may experience less stigma than those who are more publicly challenging to gender and sexual norms, i.e. street-based sex workers. Marques’ argument is based on sex workers contradictorily being considered risk takers, despite evidence to suggest sex workers employ a number of strategies to avoid risk (personal/safety), and use their sexual labour to navigate economic uncertainties. For instance, Sanders and Hardy’s (2014) study of erotic dancers in
England show how sexual labour is used to manage risk in a political economy that no longer offers stable employment, guaranteed career routes, a welfare system that offers social protection or insurance of real wages. In this context, erotic dancers dynamically engage in the sex industry, viewing stripping as neither a dead-end job nor a career, but rather, I suggest, as temporary sexual entrepreneurs – using their sexual labour as a self-optimising strategy to manage risk. Many of the participants in Sanders and Hardy’s study used the income from stripping to support further education, accumulate capital or invest in an alternative career.

Other forms of gendered entrepreneurialism, such as mumpreneurs, a term used to describe women (although it can also be men) who quit full-time, waged work for home-based self-employment as a way to manage the demands of parenthood, while earning an income. This form of entrepreneurship is celebrated in the media as a new and effective way of working (Ekinsmyth, 2014; Taylor, 2015) and is framed as a long-term solution, rather than temporary entrepreneurship. This is also seen in the work of Brooke Erin Duffy (2015) on fashion bloggers, who argues their entrepreneurialism holds the promise of future economic gain and professional opportunities within the fashion/creative industry, not outside, as seen amongst the strippers interviewed in Sanders and Hardy’s (2014) study.

Marques proposes that sex workers are labelled as ‘imprudent risk-takers’ (2010: 315) because risk is not just economic and political, it is also moral and that ‘neo-liberal conceptualizations of risk arise in tandem with the emergence of neo-conservativism’ (Marques, 2010: 322). As the management of risk is gendered, so is the conceptualisation of ‘risky behaviour’; for instance, men who have numerous sexual partners are not judged in the same manner as women who behave similarly (Rubin, 1984). Following this argument, digitally-mediated forms of sex work can potentially be framed as ‘less risky’ because the sexual service provided does not involve physical contact and takes place in a private space,
therefore within the boundary of ‘respectable visibility’ (Scoular, 2010: 34). From the position of the state, a ‘good’ sex worker, as argued by Scott (2011), is generally understood to be a ‘hygienic and socially responsible subject […] professional […] as opposed to an “amateur” or public prostitute’ (2011: 67), a process he describes as differentiating ‘the bad from the bad’ (Scott, 2011: 53).

The governmentality of neoliberalism divides those who sell sex along ‘normalising scales identifying good and bad women, polluted and clean whores’ (Scott, 2011: 61). This differentiation between what may be considered ‘respectable’ sex work is examined in Chapter Five, which explores how the British neoliberal state, alongside wider social processes of governmentality, may legitimise some forms of sex work by delegitimising others. This study engages with the questions raised by Marques (2010), Scoular (2010) and Scott (2011) and considers to what extent those that provide and consume digital sexual services are economically and socially ‘Othered’.

2.3: Marketisation of sex and intimacy
Late modernity has entailed changes in attitudes to sex, intimacy and relationships (Giddens, 1992; Illouz, 1999; Bauman, 2003; Attwood, 2006, 2009, 2011). Anthony Giddens (1992) in his book, *The Transformation of Intimacy*, addresses the unmistakeable changes in intimate relationships in Western societies. He argues that relationships are freed from many of the traditions and fixed social scripts, and are now more democratic and equalitarian. He names this as a ‘pure relationship’, one that is based on self-disclosure and pleasure, that will only continue if there is enough satisfaction for both parties to stay in it. Zygmunt Bauman (2003) makes a similar argument to Giddens, in that relationship bonds are weakened because of the liquidity of modernity. Relationships are fluid: ‘easy to enter and to exit’ (Bauman, 2003: xi), however, contradictorily making the desire to be with another more pressing. Giddens’ and
Bauman’s work points to the changes in British society that rationalises sex as something that is recreational and not limited to marriage and procreation (Bernstein, 2007; Attwood, 2009) and a source of ‘transient and renewable pleasures’ (Illouz, 1999: 176). However, the notion of fluidity of intimate relationships ignores the continuation of gendered economic inequalities such as low pay and female poverty that lead many women to feel compelled to stay in heterosexual relationships for financial reasons and social expectations (Jamieson, 1998). As Smart and Shipman (2004) argue, the individualisation thesis adopted by Bauman (2003) and Giddens (1992) does not consider the multiple reasons people form and maintain intimate relationships. We are not isolated individuals who make decisions based only on our own desires, although this may be a part of it, rather relationships and intimacy are multi-dimensional, relational and contextual.

Ken Plummer asserts, ‘sex is the big story’ (1995: 4), people have become confessional in the stories they tell about their sexual selves. However, Plummer was writing this before the transformations of communication technologies: the Internet, smartphones, online dating and digital sex markets. Almost twenty years on, Harvey and Gill (2011) argue that the ‘sexualisation of culture’ refers to more than Plummer’s statement, but that sex has infiltrated through most aspects of society. Feona Attwood (2011) suggests the ‘sexualisation of culture’ refers to the increased visibility and access to sex. For instance, there are new and diverse ways to mediate sexual encounters, and ‘ordinary people increasingly make and circulate their own sexual images and texts, often for pleasure rather than profit’ (Attwood, 2009: xiv). In this context, sex becomes more important and central to the market economy. This creates an economic and social space for digital sex markets.

As a rationality, neoliberalism disseminates the market model through all aspects of life, including the fulfilment of intimate connections (Brown, 2015). In the main, Wendy Brown’s argument in *Undoing the Demos* is focussed on the economisation of institutions
such as government and education, however, she also proposes that individuals may seek sex/intimacy in the ‘mode of an entrepreneur’ (2015: 31), committing time and money to the endeavour of seeking intimate relations. For instance, Illouz (2007) argues in her essay Romantic Webs, that seeking intimate relations has been marketised through online dating, ruled by market ideologies of competition, consumption and profit. The dissemination of marketisation under neoliberalism and the development of communication technologies, in particular the Internet, has given rise to online sex markets, not limited to explicitly commercial sex markets. Elizabeth Bernstein argues sex markets are not limited to the exchange of sex for money, but also include other ways in which ‘sexual circulations remain critical to economic projects’ (2014: 351). This marketization of sex and intimacy is evident in Rachel O’Neill’s (2018) study with London’s ‘seduction community’, a community industry of heterosexual men who attend fee-based training events, weekend courses and one to one coaching sessions on how to seduce women and have greater control in relationships. These events are supported by online forums and training videos on YouTube. Sex and intimacy increasingly become presented as sites of work and entrepreneurship (Barker et al., 2018; O’Neill, 2018), facilitated by new technologies.

The neoliberal marketisation of sex and intimacy contests the liberal notion that sex and intimacy are separate from the market, therefore disrupting the dichotomy of private/public (Attwood, 2009). This means there are more ways to buy sexual services, both online and offline, and that in some contexts buying sexual services is normalised. (Attwood, 2009; Pettinger, 2015) Although consumerism has its roots in eighteenth century industrialisation, in a neoliberal, late capitalist context like the UK, the economy is driven by consumption, ‘promoting a consumer mentality as the only mode of active and empowered subjectivity available in any public or private situation’ (Gilbert, 2013: 17). The promotion of the neoliberal consumer as active and empowered extends to digital sex markets.
The maxim ‘sex sells’ sums up the centrality of sexuality within a neoliberal consumer culture. This is evidenced in a number of studies, for instance Barker et al. (2018) map a shift in the consumption of women’s underwear from something functional to something that could signify a ‘confident and active female sexuality’ (2018: 13). Further, Wood’s (2017) study of women and sex shopping shows the centrality of consumer culture to how women shape their sexual identities through ‘appropriate’ consumption practices, such as buying sex toys from legitimate high street feminised sex shops (see also Smith, 2007; Evans et al., 2010). In addition, Tuck (2009) asserts that mediated industries, such as digitally-mediated sexual services and porn, are situated in the ethic of self-satisfaction that drives consumer society. However, there is a paradox; at the same time as being the ‘individual consuming subject required by capitalism’ (2009: 86), autoerotic modes of masturbation are considered productively wasteful, particularly for a man, although this long predates neoliberalism. On the one hand, in neoliberal Britain, the individual must economically participate through consumption, but on the other hand, sexual consumption must remain tasteful, appropriate and respectable (Smith, 2007; Wood, 2017; Barker et al., 2018). As Hubbard et al. state, ‘consumption is always tied into class’ (2013: 3).

Consumerism is never ethically or politically neutral (Pettinger, 2016), and paying for sexual services can and is viewed as deviant, as it implies a lack of sexual control, with consumers acting on impulse. As Gronow and Warde state, ‘deviant consumers are identified by their indulgence in pleasures which appear excessive, irrational and uncontrolled’ (2001: 100). Here, Goffman’s (1959) ‘bureaucratization of the spirit’ is useful in understanding how deviant consumption is personally managed. The individual can engage in their desires if they are not out of place, and are able to return to their appropriate manners when required. In this way, they are not controlled by their desires, but rather able to manage them appropriately. ‘Individuals will be concerned with maintaining the impression that they are living up to the
many standards by which they [and their products] are judged’ (Goffman, 1959: 251). This is why ‘deviant’ consumption, like buying sexual services, may remain secret, so as not to taint the consumer’s identity. There is a degree of stigma regarding sexual consumption; therefore, depending on their context, customers may engage in careful management of their consumer behaviour.

However, as Colin Campbell (1987) argues, consumer culture is supported by hedonism, imagination, passion and subjective experiences. In this context, consumption can never be truly deviant, as there is much evidence to suggest that consumerism in late capitalism is often impulsive and insatiable (Slater, 1997; Miles, 1998). Neoliberal market logic requires individuals to consume, that our identities are bound to our practises of consumption (Gilbert, 2013). In a capitalist society, which is founded in consumption for economic growth, there is a promotion of a ‘constant cycle of desire’ (Miles, 1998: 151), that is, the insatiable need to find new goods and services. A consumer is satisfied for a time, but soon the interest is directed to other services or goods. Each consumption act leads to new desires for consumption; the customer, it is argued, is never satisfied.

Research focussing wholly on production/work or consumption does not reflect the complexities of digital sex markets, as the experiences of workers/ producers may interconnect with other sex markets. The sexual consumption studied in this thesis is interactive, involving a connection or sense of social presence with another. However, this digital market is undeniably located within other sex markets, such as online porn, online dating markets and sex shops. Furthermore, digital sex workers may also be sexual consumers, and their sexual consumption practices may be part of their work. The boundary between consumer and worker may be less distinct than previous research has suggested because of the intricate and complex ways production and consumption have become
entwined. Exploring this attends to the questions raised by Wood’s study on women who write erotic texts. She states:

further studies of the sexual consumption practices of actors who engage in sexualised labour in the broadest sense would yield further insights into the interconnectedness of different fields of sexual culture, and into the blurred boundaries between sexual consumption and production in contemporary sexual lives (2015: 3).

Furthermore, Pettinger (2011) argues in her analysis of men who buy sex, that in a service industry, to understand the customer there must also be an understanding of the worker and vice versa, because they co-produce the service. My study extends the work of Pettinger, (2011, 2016) and Wood (2015) and considers how and in what ways sexual consumption and production are co-produced.

2.4: The digitalisation of sex markets

The Internet, and associated communication technologies, have undoubtedly provided new opportunities for both production and consumption of sexual goods and services. At the production end, there are new opportunities for marketing and advertising and at the consumption end, there are a variety of ways to access consumer goods and services as well as information that is used to develop a consumer identity (Rattle, 2016). Although consumption was always based on a feeling of self-satisfaction, the Internet and associated communication technologies have enabled instant gratification to be the norm.

This has had significant impact on the organisation of sex markets – transforming working practices (Earle and Sharp, 2007; Sanders, 2005, 2008b; Jones, 2015a; Sanders et al., 2016, 2018b). Prior to the Internet, technology-mediated forms of sexual services, involving more than one person, were limited to adult chat lines advertised on late night television and in newspapers. There are relatively few sociological studies considering this modality of sex work, with none analysing the phenomena in the UK; however, the studies
conducted in Italy (Selmi, 2013) and the US (Hall, 1995; Flowers, 1998; Mattley, 2006; Guidroz and Rich, 2010) show that the organisation of this form of sexual labour has changed since the platformisation of the sex industry (Van Doorn and Velthuis, 2018). Studies of telephone sex workers (Hall, 1995; Flowers, 1998; Mattley, 2006; Guidroz and Rich, 2010) reported workers to be employed in a team, mainly working in shifts at call centres, and generally paid a relatively good salary, often based on incentivising commission. Giulia Selmi’s (2013) more recent study shows the changes in labour trends, with some participants working at call centres, but others working for a small home-based company. However, in both cases participants to the study worked within a team, rather than in isolation in their own home.

Trends in the labour markets over the last two decades, some rooted in changes in the latter half of the twentieth century, have changed the landscape of ‘work’, challenging what is considered standard employment (Huws, 2017). Labour scholars, such as Huws have debated the transformations digital communication technologies are having on working organisation and practices, acknowledging that many of the changes, such as relying on freelance workers, are symptomatic of wider trends in the labour market. As she states:

If we take a job to mean an activity linked to a clear occupational identity that is carried out by employees during fixed, specified hours, normally on the employer’s premises, and providing all of the worker’s income, we can see that several of these defining features have been eroded for a substantial proportion of the population (Huws et al., 2018: 125).

Working conditions in the digital age are much more likely to be based on a framework of self-employment with ‘flexible’ working hours, working outside of formal employment premises.

There has been a growth in non-standard forms of work, such as zero-hour contracts, self-employment, part-time work, and fixed-term contracts (Huws et al., 2018). Stephanie Taylor and Susan Luckman (2018) suggest that the ‘new normal of working lives’ is
temporal, enterprising, online and personalised. These changes in the labour market are reflected in the changes in how mediated forms of sex work, and sex work more generally, are organised.

As noted in the introduction, it is predicted that platform-managed labour will continue to grow as a form of labour organisation, reflecting wider trends in the labour market, as despite the heterogeneity of digital labour, work managed by platforms is located in the neoliberal logic of deregulated labour markets, competition and entrepreneurship. What has traditionally been considered as atypical work – part time, informal, piecemeal, self-employed – is no longer consigned to the working classes and/or women, but gradually becoming the ‘new normal of work’ (Taylor and Luckman, 2018: 6). This has led scholars to question the utility of a ‘standard employment model’ based on full-time, permanent employment, which was always a gendered normative construction, as women have been more likely to engage in ‘atypical’ work (Huws, 2013, 2017). Huws (2016) suggests that the significant academic and political interest in digital labour is, in part, due to the rise in white collar, male workers working outside a ‘standard employment model’.

Another strand of digital labour literature questions the fairness of platform-managed labour and seeks to identify exploitative work relations, following the line of argument that all work is inherently exploitative, although of course, some labour is more exploitative than other forms of work (Fuchs, 2014; Standing, 2017; Scholz, 2018). In this literature there is an assumption that digital labour is low-paid and the workers inherently vulnerable (Standing, 2017; Scholz, 2018), and workers have limited agency (Choudary, 2018). However, this analysis is limited, and feminist labour scholars have applied a gender analysis to digital labour, noting that much of the unpaid or low-paid digital labour is feminised (Jarrett, 2015), and the devaluation of the work as ‘fun’ or home-based to fit around familial obligations is a

The research on digital labour is important, but has failed to explicitly include sexual labour, a form of labour traditionally assigned to women. This is not new as sex work has traditionally been excluded from official labour statistics and mainstream labour politics because of the embedded socio-legal, cultural and political context that defines female sexual labour as illegitimate work (Rand, in print). Most notable is the omission in policy papers, such as The Taylor Review – a recent report commissioned by the British government – that draws on data that claims that ‘gig economy workers are marginally more likely to be male’ (Taylor et al., 2017: 94). Similarly, a report from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2017) suggests women are less represented in the digital economy. However, these findings are based on limited assumptions of what work is, therefore excluding sex work. Sex work is a form of labour that has never been – and still is not – included in standard employment relations (O’Connell Davidson, 2014).

To date, it is only sex work scholars who have considered the impact of the digitisation of the sex industry (for instance, Ruberg, 2016; Sanders et al., 2018b; Van Doorn and Velthuis, 2018; Rand, in print). Ruberg (2016) also questions why sex work is excluded from digital labour politics. She argues in her study of amateur online pornography, that digital labour scholars have not recognised it as a form of digital labour because it is considered too much fun to be work. Similarly, digital labour scholars such as Scholz (2018) argue that digital labour is not recognised as legitimate labour that deserves compensation because of the association with pleasure and fun, i.e. gaming and blogging. Ruberg builds on this, identifying the importance of valuing both digital and sexual labour, as digital sex work, is doubly disadvantaged when it comes to receiving recognition as labour. This is because sex work falls precisely into the realm of digital labour that is perceived as too “fun” to count as work (2016: 152).
I agree with Ruberg that digital sex work is doubly disadvantaged when it comes to being recognised as a legitimate form of labour, but I suggest this is due to the varying degrees of social stigma experienced by sex workers (Weitzer, 2009), and the varied regulatory frameworks of sex work. The argument that it is ‘too fun’ appears to ignore the social, cultural, political context of sex work, since sex work is still generally considered a ‘deviant’ occupation (Nussbaum, 1998; Sanders et al., 2019a). As Nussbaum states, ‘it is widely believed, however, that taking money or entering into contracts in connection with the use of one’s sexual and reproductive capacities is genuinely bad’ (1998: 695). In light of this, I argue that digital sexual labour is currently ignored in academic and policy discussions on platform-managed work because of the inherent stigma associated with commercial sex (which disables its recognition as a form of labour), as well as the often-divisive feminist debates on commercial sex. Findings from this study significantly add to digital labour and sex work literature by analysing the working processes and practices of platforms-as-managers, and how digital sex workers engage and connect with platforms.

2.4.1: The Internet as a site to market sexual services

Sex workers increasingly market services online that take place offline, using platforms as well as personal websites (Bernstein, 2007b; Jones, 2015a, Sanders et al., 2016, 2018a, 2018b). That the Internet has removed the reliance on a third party is celebrated, resulting in many sex workers operating independently (Bernstein, 2007b), giving a ‘high level of control and autonomy over their working patterns and daily decisions in their sex work’ (Sanders et al., 2016: 7). However, despite the increase of sex workers’ control over working patterns, Pajnik et al. found in their analysis of online sex work environments in Greece, France and Slovenia that there are, ‘new forms of dependency on digital managers and providers’ (2016: 360). This contradiction is explored in my work on the role of digital platforms in the
management and facilitation of sex work, for example the control platforms have over access to the platform itself through deactivating profiles without notice.

It has also been established that many independent online sex workers work in isolation (Sanders, 2010; Sanders et al., 2016), using online modes of communication to liaise with clients (Sanders et al., 2016, 2018b). However, research also suggests that sex workers are able to use the Internet to converse with ‘virtual’ colleagues and develop online communities (Sanders, 2010). Feldman (2014) goes as far as to argue that these communities foster online political activism amongst sex workers, which supports a professionalisation of sex work, potentially increasing the respectability of sexual labour. Bernstein also argues that the Internet has brought a new professionalism to sex work, attracting a ‘new face’ of sex worker, ‘who are overwhelmingly white, native-born and relatively class privileged’ (2007a: 474). She argues that technological developments have brought a ‘respectability’ to some forms of sex work, resulting in many workers presenting a ‘single self’ rather than a division between ‘front stage’ and ‘back stage’ (Goffman, 1959), as suggested in earlier research on sex workers (Guidroz and Rich, 2010). Therefore, Bernstein argues that the ‘middle class sex worker’ challenges the dualisms that have often characterised sexual labour, such as home/work, private/public, sexuality/markets. As she notes:

Deeply implicated in these cultural inversions, middle-class workers’ sexual labour cannot be easily reduced to matters of socio-economic deprivation – at least not in the conventional sense of the term (Bernstein, 2007b: 485).

This is echoed in Brents and Sanders’ argument that much of the sex industry is acceptable in ‘mainstream’ society, and therefore ‘sexual labour is a mainstream work option for a significant proportion of women in society’ (2010: 42). Yet, this ‘respectability’ does not fully extend beyond ‘mainstream economic markets’ into social and cultural understandings of sex work. They argue that sex industries profit from being ‘just a little bit
“deviant” in order to keep activities below the parapet of everyday consumption’ (Brent and Sanders, 2010:58). My work extends both Bernstein’s (2007b) and Brents and Sanders’ (2010) studies and considers how digital modalities of sex work are an attractive option for many women and men. This research is particularly interested in the apparent paradoxes that emerge when entrepreneurship, which is usually valorised in a neoliberal context, is subject to contemporary forms of governmentality, both self-governance and that of state and institutional apparatuses that maintain sexual and gender norms.

2.4.2: Digital modalities of sex work

The Internet is not only a place for marketing sexual services and goods, it also mediates services (Jones, 2015a). Most commonly discussed in the sex work literature is the emergence of webcamming. Webcammers or webcam models, as they are commonly known, use live streaming software and webcam hardware, to perform erotic/sexual shows for paying customers (Sanders et al., 2018b). As a new modality of sex work, there has been a growing body of research that considers, amongst other things, competition amongst webcam providers (Van Doorn and Velthuis, 2018), the role of gender in interactions with customers (Weiss, 2017), the working conditions (Matthews, 2017), and the intersection of race and ethnicity in the economic success of webcammers (Jones, 2015b). Yet, as noted by Sanders et al. (2018a: 36) studies regarding webcamming are still ‘embryonic’ and there are many questions left to answer. Jones (2015a) points to several areas of enquiry that would benefit sex workers, organisations that work with sex workers, and policy developments regarding sex work. Most notably, Jones advises researchers to address the ‘diversity and complexity of sex work online’ (2015a: 567) considering the local context and the interplay with regulatory frameworks. Her own work goes some way to consider the intersection of gender and race in the construction of digital sex markets (see Jones 2015b). This study responds to Jones (2015a) by presenting the diversity and complexity of digital sex markets in the UK.
However, I add to her suggestions by considering digital modalities of sex work, as a site of work, but also as a consumption practice that is technologically organised. This picks up on Pettinger’s (2015) suggestion that to aid a more nuanced account of how commercial sex operates in a digital age, attention must be given to how organisational structures influence customers and shape working practices.

The current studies on webcamming are predominately based on online observations, or as Weiss (2018) labels it cyberethnography. As Bleakley notes,

Ethnographic research into the camgirl culture is particularly accessible given the significant role that the Internet and social media plays in fuelling the adult entertainment industry online; the multitude of young women working on the Internet as camgirls has made it necessary for those in the industry to maintain a visible public profile in order to ensure that they are able to stand out from the crowd. This provides considerable benefits to ethnographic researchers as it allows for passive observation of camgirl work without the risk of unduly influencing the findings of the study (2014: 895-896).

This methodological approach to collecting data on webcam providers needs some consideration. Although passive observations can be of benefit to the researcher, not seeking informed consent, particularly when using identifiable information of the ‘camgirls’ in the article seems ethically dubious. Similarly, Matthews’ (2017) methodological approach to studying webcam providers in the Philippines also appeared flawed. Matthews’ use of covert observations and informal interviews with Filipino webcammers, introducing himself online as ‘a friend’ rather than an academic researcher, is problematic. The researcher does not appear to take into consideration the power relations at play between a white ‘Western’ man and a women working in an illegal sector in a developing country (as noted in The Introduction, webcamming is illegal in the Philippines). Furthermore, the paternalistic and patronising language adopted by Bleakley is problematic, when he describes professional sex workers as ‘girls’.
The studies on online sex work have just begun to consider the role of platforms in the management of offline and digitally-mediated forms of sex work. Like other service industries, many aspects of the sex industry are managed and facilitated by digital platforms. Van Doorn and Velthuis describe this phenomenon as the ‘platformization’ of sex work (2018: 3). Their recent study focuses on Chaturbate, one of the leading global webcam sites. Rather than observing webcammers’ interactions with clients, they take a similar methodological approach to Pettinger’s (2011) study of Punternet, an online forum authored by men who buy sex. Using data from ‘two forums where Chaturbate was a regular topic of discussion’ (2018: 179), Van Doorn and Velthuis were able to analyse the strategies webcammers develop in regard to market competition. In the study, the authors protected the confidentiality and anonymity of those who feature in the analysis by abbreviating sex workers’ pseudonyms and altering quotations so they are not traceable. Their study is critical of the meritocratic veneer produced by the sociotechnical architecture of the platform that actually creates ‘manufactured uncertainty’ amongst webcammers. The algorithms used by Chaturbate rank webcammers against each other, informing customers of their popularity and therefore the webcammers’ economic success. This creates a ‘manufactured uncertainty’ which generates innovation, value creation and entrepreneurism amongst webcammers, ultimately making the platforms more profitable by capturing and monetising the value-generating activities of webcammers (Van Doorn and Velthuis, 2018: 179); yet, how webcammers are ranked remains shrouded in secrecy and uncertainty, known only to those who manage the platforms and algorithms.

Jones (2015b) suggests that structural and symbolic racism is at play in webcamming platforms because the algorithms consign those with darker skin to lower ranking status than ‘white’ webcammers – although this is not made explicit and it is assumed by webcammers that economic success results from neoliberal ideals of enterprising hard work, unrelated to
structural inequalities. As noted, neoliberal ideology promotes a (false) meritocracy that denies the very real effects of structural inequalities. Jones’ study found that race ‘overwhelmingly thwarts the success of black women in the online world of webcamming’ (2015b: 776). From a digital media perspective, de Reuver et al. assert that one of the challenges of studying digital platforms is so many ‘relevant interactions take place outside the view of the researcher’ (2018: 125). It appears that algorithms across platforms seem to be ‘entrenching, rather than combatting, existing social prejudices’ based around race, gender, class and sexuality (Gorwa: 2019: 859). It is through detailed studies like Jones’ (2015b) and Van Doorn and Velthuis’ (2018), that we begin to gain a clearer understanding of the role and power platforms have on the working lives of digital sex workers. This research develops this line of enquiry, questioning the role platforms have in a space where the employer relations are unregulated reflecting broader trends of deregulating labour markets. The study frames digitally-mediated sex work as platform-managed labour. As such, the research speaks to digital labour scholarship that enquires into the effects of unregulated digital labour markets (e.g. Van Doorn, 2017; Huws, 2017).

Weitzer (2010) notes there are very few systematic comparisons of male and female sex workers. One of them is Weiss’s comparison of male and female webcammers. Using online observations of webcam performances he argues that platforms do offer a meritocracy, as ‘broadcasters regardless of their gender, are subjected to the same organizational guidelines and have access to the same resources and opportunities’ (2017: 732). He argues that the professionalism of a webcammer is based on three patterns of interactions with clients. These ‘professional’ behaviours are practised by male and female webcammers and include developing intimacy through the sharing of personal details, deferring to client wishes and offering a dynamic show. Based on his observations and conceptualisation of ‘professional’, he argues that sex work scholars should re-examine the role of gender and
consider behaviours as masculine and feminine rather than prescribed to gender identities. He suggests that webcammers, regardless of gender, take on the feminine role of inferiority in relationship to the client. Weiss isolates the workers’ interactions with clients, without considering motivations and approaches to the labour. This misses a significant part of the workers’ experience, especially as ‘professionalism’ was conceptualised based on the length of show, rather for example, than money earned, or the amount of viewers a webcammer has in a show. This study draws on interview data that is inclusive of different genders including men, women and those who identify as gender fluid, and reflects on the role of gender in the motivations and approaches to sex work. If Weiss (2017) had taken these into account, he might have found that the length of time available to perform a webcam show is indeed gendered due to other commitments a worker may have and their motivations for performing the show.

Nayar’s study (2017) is one of the few studies that has drawn on data from qualitative interviews with webcammers to reveal a critical feminist analysis of their working practices and identities. She recognises webcamming to be a part of broader transformations to the cultural and media industries, thus including sex work in cultural media production. She proposes that webcammers are professional amateurs because digital communication technologies, in particular the advance of Web 2.0 have challenged the traditional dualism of amateur/professional, private/public and commercial/authentic. The amateurism promoted by many mainstream webcam platforms devalues the work of webcammers who work hard to manage an ‘authentic’ presentation of themselves and commit many hours to always being available to regular customers through communication technologies. This demonstrates the work of webcammers is extended beyond the webcam show, and bleeds into their private lives (Gregg, 2011). Viewed as amateurs, who do what they love by customers, means they
are not always treated as professionals, and customers take part in social and sexual transgressions that would not be allowed in a “professional” world.

The disruption to traditional binaries is picked up by Henry and Farvid (2017) in their theoretical article on webcamming. They draw on this relatively new form of sex work to question conventional understanding of sex work more generally such as genders of sex workers, physical safety risks and the role of a third party. They suggest that emotional and/or body work are more accurate terms to describe webcamming as sex work is connected explicitly to sex and the physical co-presence between a worker and customer. Using a different term may influence the stigma felt by webcammers and position it in line with other service and care industries, thus going some way to normalise the exchange of sexuality for money. Although it is not the authors’ intention, it is problematic to further categorise sex workers so that one group is legitimated while others are further marginalised. Researchers need to be careful to not to reinforce the neoliberal ideas of appropriate sexual entrepreneurialism which is constructed through differentiation that is classed and raced.

2.4.3: Regulating sex work in the digital age

This study brings together two bodies of literature: the regulation of sex work and the emerging field of platform governance, so as to consider the regulatory framework that simultaneously limits and endorses the platformisation of sex markets. This is a new area of enquiry that is only just beginning to be considered in the sex work literature (Sanders et al., 2018a; Scoular et al., 2019). By platform governance I mean both how platforms are governed by national state policies and the governance by platforms themselves (Gillespie, 2017). Currently, most platforms establish their own rules, taking on the role of policing content and the behaviour of their users (De Stefano, 2016; Van der Graaf and Fisher, 2017; Gillespie, 2017; Gorwa, 2019). Gorwa (2019) argues, platforms are also responsive to state
laws and the mechanisms of governance adopted by platforms reflect wider government policies. Gillespie (2017), taking a more sceptical approach, argues that platforms have taken on the role of governing their users, mostly for economic reasons, wishing to maintain and grow their user base, and also attract advertisers, thereby developing their own rules of conduct and terms and conditions. Although not liable for content uploaded by their users, platforms do have a responsibility to respond to requests to take down content that is deemed ‘unlawful’ or ‘inappropriate’. In this context, platforms rely on automated searches, reports from users and employing content moderators to search for ‘inappropriate’ behaviour/content. However, what is deemed ‘inappropriate’ is highly subjective and arguably based on what will maintain the most profit (Roberts, 2016). This can be theorised in relation to neoliberal ideology of minimum state involvement in the market, deregulation of labour markets and privatisation. In this context, platforms are potentially powerful actors in the governance and regulation of digital sex work, as they play a role in shaping meaning through cultural production. This has yet to be directly addressed in the literature on digital sex work, but will be taken up in Chapter Five of the thesis.

Literature regarding the regulation of sex work has evidenced that current sex work policies have failed to address the impact of digital communication technology on the organisation of the sex industry (Ashford, 2008, 2009; Sanders et al., 2018a, 2018b; Scoular et al., 2019). For instance, the 2014 All Party Parliamentary Group’s report on prostitution did not mention the Internet (Sanders et al., 2018b). The focus of UK law has continued to be on more visible forms of commercial sex such as street sex work. The absence of legislation regarding digital sex work is not particular to these markets, as the government has not kept up-to-date with digital transformations of many services ranging from taxi rides, food delivery to hotel industries. Howes (2017) recognise that there are policy challenges in diverse areas of labour, media, communications and consumption brought about by
transformations of the digital age. As noted in a recent parliamentary debate on regulating the digital world: ‘regulation of the digital world has not kept pace with its role in our lives’ (House of Lords Select Committee on Communications, 2019: 3). However, there does appear to be political will to address the regulatory space that has been filled by the informal rules and regulations developed by platforms (Gorwa, 2019), thus making this study timely.

However, there are concerns from sex work scholars that further regulation of online content risks promotion of the neoliberal conservative agenda of compulsory ‘respectable’ heterosexuality on which it relies upon (Attwood and Smith, 2010; Carline, 2011, Wilkinson, 2011). Carline argues, in her analysis of recent regulation of pornography and prostitution, that there has been an increase in criminalisation in regard to private sexual consumption that promotes a ‘moralistic agenda regarding appropriate performances of sexuality, particularly female sexuality’ (2011: 330). This study questions how the law, alongside wider social processes of governmentality establishes norms, influences working practices and shapes content of digital sex work.

Connected to the regulation of digital sex markets is the policing of these online markets. Sanders et al.’s (2018b) study is the first to consider how digital sex markets in the UK are being policed. Overall, they found that police responses to digital sex markets were ‘undeveloped’ (Sanders et al., 2018b: 126), with little knowledge of digitally-mediated services such as webcamming. The focus of police forces in the UK in relation to sex work remains primarily within the remit of trafficking/modern slavery and child exploitation. In this regard, some police forces did monitor sex work platforms to look for cases of exploitation, often making assumptions of exploitation based on nationality, raising questions of sex workers’ civil liberties (Sanders et al., 2018b).

Platforms are not liable to share information with the police or other bodies unless there is a court order to do so, as information regarding the identity of workers and customers
is protected under the UK Data Protection Act (Sanders et al., 2018b). This resulted in ‘relatively limited interaction’ between the police and the platforms (Sanders et al., 2018b: 148). Although hinted at by Sanders et al., their discussion of police involvement in platform content and working practices sits within broader discussions on platform governance and issues of privacy and free speech. As digital governance scholar Gillespie (2017) acknowledges, policing platforms is difficult because of the anonymity provided by some sites, encrypted Internet connections and lack of international jurisdiction.

In addition to a general lack of specific or appropriate policies regarding platforms that manage labour, sex work research shows there are additional and unique risks for sex workers, such as doxing and capping (Jones, 2016; Sanders et al., 2018b; Campbell et al., 2018). Doxing is the term used to describe when a person hacks into a website to find out more about the sex worker. Capping refers to the recording or capturing of a webcam session without the permission of the digital sex worker. These particular risks are not specifically addressed in emerging forms of state digital governance. For instance, s.33 Criminal Justice and Courts Act (2015), unhelpfully dubbed the ‘revenge porn act’ makes it illegal to distribute sexual films or photographs of an individual without their consent, but it can be used as a defence if it is believed the films or photographs had ‘previously been disclosed for reward’ (s.33. 5 (a) Criminal Justice and Courts Act). The rules and regulations adopted by platforms state they own the copyright of all images, films and information in an effort to protect the content of the platforms. In Chapter Seven I analyse how digital sex workers protect themselves from harm in the context of platform governance.

2.5: Stigmatised sexual labour

The marketisation of sex and intimacy, as well as the digitisation of sex markets, suggest there is a process of economic mainstreaming and to some extent a legitimisation of
commercial sex (Brents and Sanders, 2010). However, selling sex is not free from social and emotional risks, and buying and selling sex remains stigmatised. It is unequivocally recognised that stigma ‘colours all sex work’ (Weitzer, 2009: 30), yet, there are differences in how stigma is produced; to do with time, place, citizenship, gender, sexuality, class, race and ethnicity (Sanders et al., 2017a; Weitzer, 2018). Stigma, as noted by Goffman, ‘can function as a means of formal social control’ (1963: 166). This is commonly accepted in theories of stigma. For instance, Nussbaum (2004) argues that societies stigmatise certain groups because of deep insecurities linked to the inherent fragility and eventual mortality of individuals, proposing that this is universal to all humankind. There is no control over the mortality of life, so there is a desire to regain control. Societies do this by creating an ideal type. The dominant group controls an outside group by projecting weakness and inadequacy onto them, rooted in the concept of an ideal type. Link and Phelan develop Goffman’s theory of stigma, conceptualising stigma as dependent on structural and institutional power,

that allows the identification of differentness, the construction of stereotypes, the separation of labelled persons into distinct categories, and the full execution of disapproval, rejection, exclusion, and discrimination (2001: 365).

Stigma is based on the dichotomy of ‘us’ and ‘them’. It is a social process based on oversimplified categories of people, for example black/white, able-bodied/disabled, whore/virgin, gay/straight (Link and Phelan, 2001). Although these dichotomies are false, as there are no defining attributes that can be applied to these categories, they appear to persist in society and are used as a means of control.

In relation to sex work, Nussbaum (2004) argues that the stigma associated with prostitution is linked to concerns about female sexuality. She describes this as an unjust, unequal and irrational fear of female sexuality, where too much lust has traditionally been conceptualised as dangerous. She suggests the body of a ‘female whore’ is the most shameful, and works as social control of women, distancing the ‘respectable’ female body
from the ‘female whore’ (Nussbaum 2004: 137). Gail Pheterson (1993) argues that the ‘whore stigma’ does not only control those who sell sex, but the label of ‘whore’ regulates the behaviour of all women and contributes to the maintenance of gender and sexual norms, differentiating between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ women. Following this line of argument, Pheterson argues that this stigma is gendered, as a women ‘is bad for who she is’ whereas a man who buys sex, and arguably a man who sells sex is ‘bad for what he does’ (1993: 48).

There has been a focus in sex work research on how sex workers manage ‘discrediting information’ by adopting strategies to keep their work identity secret (Day and Ward, 2004; Sanders, 2005b; Guidroz and Rich, 2010; Koken et al., 2010). As a symbolic interactionist, Goffman argues that stigma only has power if there is an audience for the person to be discredited in front of, therefore, stigma is relational. Some stigmatising attributes based on physical appearance are identifiable on sight, while other stigmatising information may be concealed and hidden from others. In such cases, Goffman argues that individuals engage in the ‘the management of undisclosed discrediting information about self’ (1963: 58), constantly evaluating whether to ‘to tell or not to tell; to let on or not to let on; to lie or not to lie’ (Goffman, 1963: 57), which can lead to isolation, depression and anxiety. A number of empirical studies with those in a range of occupations in the sex industry, including telephone sex workers, have found respondents engage in numerous strategies to manage the disclosure of the potentially stigmatising information. For instance, Sanders’ (2005) study with mainly indoor sex workers revealed that they hid their work from friends and family by creating alternative work identities. Similarly, Guidroz and Rich’s study with twelve female telephone sex workers in the US found participants navigated working in a ‘deviant’ occupation by making clear distinctions between ‘home’ and ‘work’, often leading double lives, which ‘can be time-consuming, stressful, and mentally exhausting’ (2010: 147). Further, Day and Ward’s (2004) 15-year longitudinal study with 130 female indoor and street-based sex workers in
London has shown that managing the stigma associated with sex work can have permanent and complex effects on mental health, both in the short term and long term. They found some women chose to lead an alternative lifestyle, which allowed them to be ‘out’ as a sex worker, but others were burdened by ‘the process of concealment and disclosure’ (Goffman, 1963: 50), which in some cases led to mental health problems.

However, Sanders et al.’s (2017a) review of sex work and mental health warns against over simplifying the relationship between stigma and mental health, as sex workers resist stigmatisation in several ways. Sex workers advocate for their labour to be recognised as legitimate/legal and campaign for their opinions to be taken into consideration in policy and academic discussions (West, 2000; Gall, 2007). Furthermore, sex worker advocates run training sessions for other sex workers to improve working conditions ranging from sessions on how to deal with stigma or clients to processing tax returns (Garofalo Geymonat and Macioti, 2016). As Benoit et al. note in their review of sex work and stigma,

stigmatized groups are not passive actors who universally subscribe to the stigma and apply it to themselves in the process of internalization; many, in fact, assert their agency through finding ways to adapt and manage the stigma they are faced with and sometimes reframe or resist it (2018: 459).

In addition, several authors point to the regulatory framework of sex work and the power of the legal system to reinforce or challenge stigmatising labels (Sanders et al., 2017a; Sanders, 2018; Weitzer, 2018;).

Nevertheless, there is a risk of reinforcing stigma through research, as it becomes the defining feature of a group. As Heather Love (2014) writes in a special edition of *Disability Quarterly* on stigma, describing the conditions of stigmatisation there is a risk stigma will be reproduced through research. To some extent this has become evident in the literature on sex work, always suggesting paid-for sex is stigmatised to the same degree, in all contexts, to the same degree. This study seeks to explore this assumption by framing stigma not as a static defining attribute but a social construct and therefore, with the potential to be a changing
social process (Hammond and Kingston, 2014; Weitzer, 2018; Sanders, 2018). I do not wish to assume stigma is always part of the sex workers’ experience, but to consider how, and in what ways, the stigma associated with commercial sex is revealed and understood by those who sell and buy digitally-mediated sexual services in an uncertain regulatory framework.

2.6: Feminist debates on female sexual labour

Feminist debates on gender power inequalities and the impact this has on female sexuality within the structures of patriarchy have led to much discussion on selling sexual services, producing polarising opinions amongst feminists and others. On the one hand, sex work is viewed as male violence against women and an exemplar of patriarchy, as women are considered to be victims of gender power inequalities in the sex work encounter (MacKinnon, 1989; Farley, 2004; Jeffreys, 1997, 2009; Coy et al., 2012; Bindel, 2017). On the other hand, it is argued that if sex workers had the same legal rights as other citizens, selling sexual services would be seen as a form of labour, a job like any other (Jenness, 1993), with advocates pointing out that the stigmatisation of women who sell sex, damages all women (Pheterson, 1989; Chapkis, 1997; Delacoste and Alexander, 1998). This has led to ongoing activism by sex workers and their allies to decriminalise sex work, in a harm minimisation and human rights approach to sex work (see Cruz, 2013 for a discussion on the claims and the limitations of the demands made by sex worker rights activists).

Second wave radical feminists such as MacKinnon (1989), and more recently feminists such as Farley (2004), Jeffreys (2009), Coy et al. (2012), and Bindel (2017) refuse to accept selling sex can be a form of labour because it is seen as a form of violence against women and, therefore, fundamentally ‘bad’ for all women. Accepting ‘prostitution’ as a form of labour would therefore normalise violence against women. MacKinnon (1989) argues that female sexuality is defined by men’s desires based upon women’s submissiveness and
‘prostitution’ is the ultimate expression of this, as men are able to buy women’s bodies to use as they want. Following this argument, prostitution is framed as male oppression of women (Weitzer, 2007). MacKinnon’s argument can be challenged on two fronts. Firstly, she makes essentialist claims that all men are rapists, and all women who in engage sexually with men (commercial or non-commercial) are coerced to some extent. This takes away all agency for those who engage in commercial sex reducing women who sell sex to victims (Phoenix and Oerton, 2005). Secondly, it ignores differing degrees of agency within commercial sex, either at entry into sex work and during interactions with customers (Bernstein, 2007b). Thirdly, I argue that women’s bodies are not being purchased but rather sex workers are selling their labour or service. Pettinger (2011) argues that sexual service work is not so different to other forms of service work as it shares labour processes such as emotional labour, sexualised labour, aesthetic labour and physical labour. As discussed in The Introduction, there is an established literature that has shown that ‘women’s work’ is routinely sexualised through dress and expected behaviours of women, and the female body is commodified to sell products, ideas and lifestyles (Adkins, 1995; Warhurst and Nickson, 2009; Tyler, 2012). For instance, Adkins’ (1995) examines how women’s sexuality is used to help make a profit in the retail and hospitality industries.

Here, it is important to challenge ideas about the very nature of work itself. Julia O’Connell Davidson (2014) argues that the body is central to all forms of waged labour. It is made more explicit in sex work/sexual labour, but all waged labour is embodied. It is a liberal myth that a worker can detach themselves from their labour, like they can from their property, as labour is an embodied act and cannot exist without the body of the worker. Therefore, all labourers submit their will to their employer to some extent, and most of people have to work to support themselves and their families. Therefore, both Kathi Weeks (2011) and O’Connell Davidson (2014) question the usefulness of framing sex work as a job
like any other (e.g. Jenness, 1993), as it does not question the exploitation and coercion that can take place in waged work. That said, both authors acknowledge that the ‘sex as work’ discourse has achieved progress in regards to working conditions and workers’ rights in countries such as New Zealand and Germany. Extending the work of Weeks and O’Connell Davidson, Kate Hardy (2013: 56) champions a radical politics of sex work that not only challenges the structural inequalities that produce the conditions in which sex work takes place, but also looks to challenge the ‘commodification of everything’ (Gilbert, 2008), including labour. By doing this, these scholars seek to advocate for a world where it is possible to be free from waged labour, to be able to refuse work, in all its forms, including sex work.

This study moves away from binary argument of ‘sex as work’ or as exploitation/violence, thus allowing the research to unpack sexual labour within particular material conditions and to assess choice and agency within specific sites of work. There is great diversity within sex markets and this study adds to the literature that shows the heterogeneous nature of sex work in regard to genders of workers, services sold and bought, and the spectrum of choice and agency employed by sex workers in different contexts and at different times.

Here, a temporal approach to agency is useful. Sanders and Hardy (2014) argue that ‘choice’ can only be understood in relation to ‘ongoing political economic transformations’ such as stagnant wages, deregulation and flexibilisation of labour markets, the privatisation of education and poor alternatives for women seeking part-time work. In their study, they found strippers engaged in the industry because it provided them the economic resources to invest in their futures through education, vocational training and other life goals. Thus reducing future uncertainty in their lives.
2.7: Challenges to the patriarchal lens of prostitution studies

In many ways, recent research challenges the patriarchal lens taken by prostitution studies that omits sex work which takes place outside of heteronormative frameworks of sex and gender (for example, MacKinnon, 1989; Farley, 2004; Bindel, 2017). There are a number of empirical studies regarding women who consume sex, thus complicating the assumption that men buy sex and women sell it. For instance, Kingston and Hammond (2014) research women who buy sex in the UK, Pilcher (2011) has extensively researched women who watch male strippers as a leisure activity and Johnson (2016), Sanchez-Taylor (2006), Phillips (1999) have analysed female sex tourism in the Caribbean. There is evidence to suggest that as women gain more economic power, they also consume sex, albeit in different contexts and modalities.

Furthermore, there has been an increased focus on male sex work in academic research, challenging the gender essentialism apparent in some feminist prostitution studies. Minichiello et al. (2013) observe that there has been a rise in studies regarding male sex work, due to the changes the Internet has brought to the organisation and structure of male sex work. As noted, the Internet has increased access for researchers, which in turn, has seen shifts in how male sex work is revealed and understood. Prior to the Internet, male sex work was generally side-lined in sociological studies on the sex industry, with a focus primarily on female street sex workers (Koken et al., 2010; Vanwesenbeeck, 2001). Minichiello et al.’s (2013) literature review of male sex work proposes that earlier studies tended to perceive male sex workers as a social problem, either one of deviancy or sociopathology. For example, Sagarin and Jolly (1997) contributed to a book on sexual deviancy with a chapter titled ‘Prostitution: Profession and Pathology’. This labelling has led to what has been described and experienced as ‘double stigma’. Male sex workers are labelled in heteronormative
mainstream culture as a form of sexual (homosexual) and gendered (prostitution) deviance (Minichiello et al., 2013; Koken et al., 2010). Yet, Koken et al. confirm that ‘while gay and bisexual men face stigma in the heteronormative mainstream culture, being a member of the gay community appeared to be a “protective factor” reducing male escorts’ experience of stigma within their own community’ (2010: 229).

However, as Vanwesenbeeck (2013) argues, the norms of masculinity are more troubled by male homosexuality than they are by promiscuous and commercial sex. This is reflected in how prostitution has been framed by the British legal system (Ashford, 2009). Historically, prostitution was considered solely a female occupation. It was not until the Sexual Offences Act 2003 that a gender-neutral language was adopted. Legal concerns regarding male sexuality have focussed on homosexuality, rather than male sex work, with the two often becoming conflated (Minichiello et al., 2013). The most recent policy papers on sex work for England and Wales, not only failed to address the increase in online sex work, but largely ignored male sex work; for instance, _Paying the Price_, (2004), _A Coordinated Prostitution Strategy_, (2006), and more recently a report from The Conservative Party, (2019). Whowell (2010) claims this is reflective of the gendered assumptions adopted by UK governments which lead to policies being based on the premise that prostitution is a form of violence against women. This study goes some way to reveal the complexities and diversity of sex markets in the digital age.

The literature on men who sell sex discusses the relatively normalised attitude to commercial sex in gay communities (Koken et al, 2010), making sex work more visible (Koken et al., 2004) and ‘acceptable’ (Minichiello et al., 2013). In particular, MacPhail et al., (2015) claim the Internet has made male sex work an ‘everyday phenomenon’. Furthermore, Ashford shows that commercial and non-commercial sex share online spaces in the ‘virtual gay community’ (2009: 279). This suggests that the boundary between commercial and non-
commercial sex is more permeable than is perhaps indicated in the literature on women who sell sex. Using the market to explore sexuality is extended beyond the ‘gay community’.

There are a number of studies that have found individuals draw on the market to explore, experiment and express gender and sexual identities; for example, Matthen et al.’s study in Vancouver with sex workers who self-identified as men found ‘that some individuals utilize sex work in order to express and explore stigmatized aspects of their identities’ (2018: 491). In addition, Robinson and Moskowitz’s (2013) online survey of 499 men who were seeking sexual services from men online found that the Internet is providing a space for men to explore their sexual desires without risk of disclosure, and therefore stigmatisation. These findings support research from Koken et al.’s (2004) study that men who buy sex from men also use commercial sexual encounters to explore stigmatising aspects of their identity. This study speaks most closely to Matthen et al. (2018) as they propose that the Internet has enabled novel understandings of male sexual identities and behaviours that are worthy of research.

I respond to Matthen et al.’s call for researchers to give ‘attention to sexual and gender diversity in their field of inquiry’ (2018: 481). As Smith (2012) notes in her study of the political economy of male sex work in San Francisco, ignoring men in discussions on sex work reproduces the female body as whore, reproducing gendered assumptions regarding commercial sex. One of the complexities of this study is bringing together divergent experiences based on gender, sexual identities and class, as well as roles within the sex industry. However, the study seeks to challenge a simplistic theorisation of the sex industry, and instead study digital sex markets through a lens that allows for sex workers and customers to have more complex and diverse sexual identities, practices and behaviours.

Furthermore, it is this body of literature that challenges the traditional distinction made between sex worker and clients (Koken et al., 2004; Ashford, 2009; MacPhail et al.,
2015; Matthen et al., 2018). I extend the findings in these studies and explore the more fluid roles participants inhabit and consider how they are gendered. There is evidence of a more complicated picture than distinct roles of male client and female worker, as well as consumer and producer/worker. This calls into question policy and academic discussions that tend to focus on prescribed gender roles.

2.8: Men who buy sex

Whilst recent studies show the diversity of gender and sex markets by exploring male sexual services purchased by men (Koken et al., 2004, 2010; Minichiello et al., 2013; Matthen et al., 2018), and female consumers of sex (Kingston and Hammond, 2016; Pilcher, 2011; Phillips, 1999), it is important to emphasise that most sex markets are produced and shaped by dominant gender inequalities. The dominant forms of sex work both nationally and globally are sold by women and purchased by men (O’Connell Davidson, 1998; Sanders, 2005b; Sanders and Hardy, 2012). The gendered organisation of commercial sex has been explained in a number of ways, depending on the perspective of the researchers. Based on an economic model of prostitution, Della Giusta et al. (2009) argue that women provide the supply for sexual services and men are the demand, not because of ‘biological essentialism’, but rather due to income disparity between men and women evident in all countries.

This is in contrast to radical feminists, like MacKinnon, who as mentioned earlier have suggested men who buy sex are the same as men who commit rape, child abuse and intimate partner violence: ‘rape, battery, sexual harassment, sexual abuse of children, prostitution and pornography emphasise and actualise the distinct power of men over women in society’ (1989: 315). This gender reductionism places sexual consumption as a problem of male sexuality, framing those who buy sex as pathological (Sanders, 2008a). The approach adopted by feminists such as MacKinnon, feeds into the popular opinion that men who buy
Sex are ‘Other’, ‘a dangerous and uncivil character who is an abuser of women’ (Sanders, 2008a: 174).

Sanders (2008a) provides a more complex understanding of sexual consumption, suggesting that cultural norms, particularly around masculinities, are important in constructing commercial sex markets, but that fundamentally the markets prosper because of consumerism in late capitalistic society. Sanders’ study comprised 48 in-depth qualitative interviews with men who buy sex. She found the Internet was a place where clients of sex workers self-regulate, developing norms and values on how to behave as a ‘punter’. Sanders considers that some men in the study did make decisions based on their individual morality, and were aware of the complexities of sex markets and forms of exploitation that could take place. This ‘speaks directly against’ (Sanders, 2008a: 60) Earle and Sharp’s (2007) study on men who pay for sex who also used data taken from online communities. They claimed that men who buy sex did not consider moral issues and ‘simply bracketed it out’ (2007: 38), although they did also report that the men were concerned with giving, as well as receiving pleasure and therefore were not looking for vulnerable women who may have been coerced into sex work. The different findings reflect the diversity of experiences in commercial sex, and it is not that one study erases the other. More recent studies have added to Sanders (2008) focus on the need for emotional intimacy as motivation for buying sex, rather than assuming the act to be deviant and criminal.

There is a theme in studies on men who pay for sex, not unlike studies of women who sell sex, which focus on why they do so. For instance, Sanders (2008a) produced a typology of men’s motivations and Birch’s (2015) study focussed on motivations. Birch (2015) carried out a mixed-method study with men who buy direct sex in New South Wales, Australia between 2009 – 2011. Birch problematizes the labels of deviant, pathological and/or criminal as universalising negatives associated with those who buy sex. By questioning simplistic
understandings of sex, sexuality and therefore, also the interaction between a customer and a
sex worker, he argues that there are multiple reasons why men buy sex that can include
physical reasons, but is ‘centred on more expressive (emotions and intimacy based) reasons
(2015: 157). Pitts et al. (2004), Monto (2010) and Milrod and Monto (2012) also explore the
complexities of why men pay for sex.

Hammond and van Hooff (2019) provide an analysis that explores the social context
of buying sex, drawing on theorizations of hegemonic masculinity. They identify that
neoliberal individualism promotes self-satisfaction through the market, and the men in their
study were able to use their ‘economic’ resources to address issues of sexual dissatisfaction
(2019: 7), adopting entrepreneurial masculinity, by using a self-managerial approach to their
sexual lives and drawing on the market to find fulfilment. In this context and within a
framework of hegemonic masculinity the men in their study understood their behaviour as a
normative masculine act.

As noted, the Internet brought new ways to study sex markets, particularly areas that
have previously been understudied, such as male sex work and customers of sex workers.
Soothill and Sanders (2005), Earle and Sharp (2007) and Pettinger (2011) were able to draw
on data from ‘field reports’ from Punternet – an online review site for heterosexual
identifying men who buy sex. Soothill and Sanders (2005) looked in the ‘field reports’ for
patterns of behaviour on spending and location, concluding that the Internet has dramatically
changed the behaviour patterns of customers. Both in terms of geographical mobility and
providing a space for support and advice amongst customers of sex workers.

Pettinger’s study framed sex work as not atypical of service work and of men who
pay for sex as customers. By doing this, she was able to analyse customer reviews on
Punternet as part of broader gendered and sexualised behaviours and expectations of
customers. In her analysis she found customers demanded good service based on authenticity
and their own preferences. She was able to draw conclusions on the professionalism of sex workers, based on what was demanded by the customers. This study responds to the body of literature that has brought customers into research on sex markets (Soothill and Sanders, 2005; Earle and Sharp, 2007; Sanders, 2008a; Pettinger, 2011; Birch, 2015; Hammond, 2019) to understand how the customers co-create the market, alongside other market devices, such as technology and the law. This is a growing area of research and this diversifies the focus by including men who buy digitally-mediated services.

2.9: Conclusion

The research for this thesis is located within a specific local context and regulatory framework and therefore responds to Jones’ (2015a) suggestion that future research regarding online sex work should be contextual. This literature review has outlined the specific late capitalism, neoliberal UK context this study takes place in, highlighting the specific effects on women in this political economy. The study extends previous research on digital modalities of sex work, as studies have tended to either focus on telephone sex work (Selmi, 2013; Guidroz and Rich, 2010; Mattley, 2006; Flowers, 1998; Hall, 1995) or webcamming (Van Doorn and Veltuis, 2018; Matthews, 2018; Weiss, 2017; Jones, 2015b, 2016), with the exception of Sanders (2018b). The research departs from this by incorporating all forms of mediated exchanges – paid and unpaid – in the analysis, and recognising the interrelated nature of online and offline sex markets. This study considers how the technological architecture of digital platforms shape and influence the behaviours and practices of workers and customers of digitally-mediated sexual service. Furthermore, the current literature on webcamming has, in the main, been based on observations. While these studies are important, this study adds to the knowledge of this relatively new form of sex work by including data from interviews with workers and customers, as well as drawing on online observations, and
textual analysis of sex worker community forums and sex work platforms’ governance documents, such as their terms and conditions and codes of conduct.

Additionally, the study responds to Pettinger’s (2015) argument that policy regarding sex work and the Internet needs to explore fully the complexities and diversity of sex markets in the digital age. It adds to this by demonstrating the sexual and gender diversity of those engaged in digital sex markets, which calls into question the assumed gender roles often focussed on in policy debates regarding commercial sex markets. In response to this diversity the study considers how sex work related stigma in the digital age is understood and negotiated by workers and customers in regard to their gender, sexuality and age, without assuming that stigma is a defining feature of all commercial sex in all contexts.

This literature review places this research at the interplay of digital labour and sexual labour and, therefore, adds to the literature on digital labour and specifically platform-managed labour. It is located in a dynamic and evolving area of research that is concerned with digital labour and digital governance. Bringing sexual labour into these discussions widens debates by exploring these areas through a lens of gender and sexuality.
Chapter Three: Methodology: A mixed-method approach for an online research setting

3.1: Introduction

This chapter presents the methodological approach of the project, including the research design, approaches to the data collection, analysis and ethical considerations. This research developed from my interest in understanding the market of digitally-mediated sexual services. This led to a recognition that there was a gap in knowledge in regard to the digital changes that appeared to be transforming the production and consumption of commercial sex. I began the study by exploring an under-researched phenomenon of technology-mediated sexual services: erotic phone lines. In the spring of 2015, I embarked on a three-month feasibility study, based on concerns regarding recruiting participants to the study. During this time, I observed that digital communication technology has, and continues to, radically transform the organisation of sex markets, in part, due to the emergence of digital platforms that act as an intermediary between workers and customers, facilitating new (and traditional) modalities of sex work. In this initial stage, I learnt that it is beneficial to the research process to simultaneously generate and analyse the data so the data continued to inform the research design throughout the project (Charmaz, 2014). A research project is not linear, but rather it is a ‘difficult, messy, fraught, emotional, tiring and yet rewarding process’ (Skeggs, 1995: 2). In what follows I discuss how I adapted the research design throughout the project, in response to the difficulties I faced and the limitations to the study.

This thesis is situated in a feminist paradigm, which almost, by its very definition of feminist, takes a social constructivist approach to knowledge production. That is, I do not believe in universal truths, but rather I assume that narratives, actions and beliefs are constructed in relation to the context in which they take place, in ‘situated knowledges’ (Haraway, 1988: 575). Such situated knowledges are not neutral, but rather they are
interpreted and presented through a number of influences, for instance, mass media, moral and religious codes, legal frameworks, opinions from friends and family, therapeutic discourses, magazines and guides in the form of self-help manuals, and personal understandings (Sanders, 2008a). Furthermore, I understand gender to be a construct in itself that results in and is shaped by specific power dynamics that are changeable. This is also a political project because at the heart of feminism is the desire to change unequal gendered power dynamics (Stanley and Wise, 1993; Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002; Oakley, 2005), although how this is achieved is open to interpretation, as ‘feminist’ assumes different meanings to different people. This plurality of meanings is also reflected in debates on whether there can even be a feminist methodology because, as Stanley and Wise state: ‘carrying out feminist research is a complicated business […] there is no single “right way” to do feminist research’ (2008: 223).

As a feminist researcher I consider sociological research to be socially transformative in regards to gender and gender power relations (Oakley, 2005; Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002; Stanley and Wise, 1993) through the process of:

…making the invisible visible, bringing the margin to the center, rendering the trivial important, putting the spotlight on women as competent actors, understanding women as subjects in their own right rather than objects for men – all continue to be elements of feminist research (Reinharz, 1992: 248).

Therefore, this study is ‘embedded in a transformative paradigm that seeks to expose, oppose, and redress forms of oppression, inequality and injustice’ (Charmaz, 2017: 35). I consider the study to be part of a ‘destigmatisation’ process advocated by sex work scholars, such as Weitzer (2018) and Sanders (2006, 2018) because as a researcher, I ‘can occupy a place for privileged actors to take up the fight of destigmatisation’ (Sanders, 2018: 737, paraphrasing Weitzer, 2018). I wish to challenge myths associated with sex work and sex workers, and despecialise this type of work by framing it as a form of labour (Hardy, 2013), as well as recognising and resisting the gender, class, sexual and racial inequalities that produce and
shape digital sex markets in a neoliberal context (Hardy, 2013; Chapkis, 2018; Phoenix, 2018).

3.2: Selection of method

I adopted an ethnographic approach as this research is grounded in a commitment to exploring a ‘social and cultural setting on the basis of (though not exclusively by) participant observation’ (Atkinson et al., 2007: 4-5). The participant observations took place online and can therefore be described as an online ethnography. The digital ‘field’ being studied required I used both online and offline methods, therefore reflecting the phenomenon being studied. As a relatively new development located online – one that has not been extensively researched – I decided to draw on multiple sources for data collection to harness the opportunities digital communication technologies offer social research ‘in an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011: 5). These included: online ethnographic observations; digital documentary analysis; thirty-three qualitative interviews with nineteen workers and five customers, totalling 22 hours of taped interview, mainly conducted through the medium of digital communication technologies; an online survey with customers of digital sexual services; data mining from the leading platform of digital sex markets; and thematic analysis of published autobiographical sex worker accounts (blogs and books).

The Internet is a valuable tool for qualitative social researchers as both a tool for communication, facilitating access, recruitment and data collection, and a site for study (Mason, 2002; Markham, 2003; Hesse-Biber and Griffin, 2013; Salmons, 2016). The Internet has been used by sex work researchers in innovative ways to understand further the production and consumption of sex markets in the UK; as a result studies have diversified to include groups that were previously excluded from studies, particularly men and non-binary
people as both workers and consumers. For instance, Sanders et al. (2018b) used a large-scale online survey to collect data on clients of online sex workers; Sanders (2008a) and Hammond (2011) drew on customer review sites of sex workers to recruit to studies of clients; the same review sites, such as *Punternet*, have been used as a site of study (Pettinger, 2011; Earle and Sharp, 2007), as well as other user forums (see Van Doorn and Velthuis, 2018). The Internet has increased access to a previously ‘invisible’ population (Campbell, 1998: 155; Sanders, 2008a), and therefore, under-researched areas of sex markets (Minichiello et al., 2013). This study continues with these innovative online approaches to social research.

### 3.2.1: Online ethnography

The majority of my observational fieldwork was temporal and intermittent, logging on and off to the Internet when required (Hine, 2000). My research approach is influenced by Charmaz’s (2008, 2014, 2017) ‘social constructionist grounded theory’: the research design was led by the data with ‘explicit guidelines that promise flexibility and encourage innovation’ (Charmaz, 2008: 398). These include recognising that the research context is itself a social construct and is affected by the concerns of participants, their actions and situations. Further, I responded to the insights and questions that arise from the participants by reflexively improvising and adapting the research methods, thus collecting rich data so I could analyse and theorise without oversimplifying and erasing differences. This approach proved invaluable, as I was able to be exploratory, adaptive and responsive in order to understand a relatively new phenomenon.

From September 2014 - May 2016 I made observations of platforms and websites on a nearly daily basis, taking notes and constructing memos to develop my understanding of digital sex markets. Initially, my focus was on online ‘advice seeking communities’ (Wesolowski, 2014: 2); both sex work and ‘mainstream’ advice-seeking communities
regarding work opportunities. I conducted a detailed thematic analysis of thirteen threads,\(^1\) shown in Table 3.1; five were taken from a sex work-specific forum and the remaining eight from ‘mainstream’ user-generated forums. Taking a combination of threads from different forums provided a range of perspectives, which included workers, recruiters and those considering working in digital sex markets. At this stage, I investigated the possibility of obtaining data from client review sites, but the contributions were overwhelmingly focussed on direct forms of sex work which was not the aim of the study. Furthermore, studies have already conducted research on customers of direct sex services drawing on client review sites (see Earle and Sharp, 2007; Pettinger, 2011). I developed themes according to the frequency of the themes occurrence in the threads, as well as the way themes were presented by user thus evaluating the importance of a theme (Charmaz, 2008). These included were not limited to: generating an income, concerns regarding stigma, getting started, conflating markets and working practices. This gave me an understanding of digital sex markets.

### Table 3.1: Content analysis of advice-seeking communities discussing digital sex work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platform/website</th>
<th>Thread title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Money saving expert - Boost your income forum</td>
<td>“Excel telemedia target thread”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The money shed - Earning money online forum</td>
<td>“Adult/text/webcam/phone/livechat work”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student room</td>
<td>“Err, I want to become a webcam model for a porn site”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mumsnet</td>
<td>“To take a job as a ‘sexting’ operative”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“To take a job on a phone sex line”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“To consider a job as a ‘chat operative’?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“To go ahead and be a sex chatline worker?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“To be considering webcam work”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) A thread is a specific theme addressed in a forum to which users contribute.
**SAAFE (Support and advice for escorts)**

- “Wanting to become an escort/webcam girl on Adultwork. Need some advice”
- “Webcam agency – join our group today/rent a room for camming?”
- “Webcamming advice”
- “Buddy required for webcamming and duo bookings”
- “Webcam info”

A key finding from this initial analysis, was that the platform, *Adultwork*, was the most significant sex work platform in the UK, acting as a labour broker for those wishing to sell digitally-mediated forms of sex work. Therefore, the second stage of the online ethnography focussed on this platform. *Adultwork* was founded in 2003 as *Adultwork.co.uk*, changing its domain name to *Adultwork.com* in 2005 (Sanders et al., 2018b). At the time of writing, the web traffic analytics company Alexa ranks *Adultwork* as #242 on their list of visited websites in the UK (Alexa, 2019). The majority of the platform’s visitors are based in the UK (83.4%), followed by the US (3.5%), Italy (2.2%), Japan (1.7%) and Romania (1.4%) (Alexa, 2019). In addition, in-depth data mining was carried out by Dr James Allen-Robertson at the University of Essex (an expert on data mining) on my behalf, revealing that on 14 June 2016 there were 25,334 sex worker profiles on *Adultwork*, with the majority providing escort services only (69%), followed by those who offer escort and digitally-mediated services (19%) and those who only provide mediated services (12%). One of the hurdles of an online study is identifying the boundary of a study because the Internet is vast and ever-changing, hence, having identified *Adultwork* as the leading UK sex work platform, I was able to focus the project on it and better delimit its scope (Hesse-Biber and Griffin, 2013).
In June 2015, I conducted a documentary analysis of Adultwork’s code of conduct and its terms and conditions. This gave me a clear understanding of the legal language adopted, how workers were able to set up profiles, payment structures and the services available. I did not focus on individual sex worker profiles until I was given informed consent by interview respondents as it was important to me, from an ethical perspective, to be respectful and protect the privacy of individuals. I also conducted a thematic content analysis through observing blog entries of two of the sex workers I interviewed. It was only these two who described writing a blog in the interviews. Generally, a blog is defined as ‘a personal online journal where entries are posted chronologically’ (Salmons, 2016: 43), however, in this context, digital sex workers use blogs on Adultwork to draw attention to their profile and create feelings of intimacy and knowledge between themselves and their customers, thus they were still written in a personal ‘chatty’ journal style. For further ethnographic enquiry, I also drew on data from published autobiographical accounts – Audacia Ray’s Naked on the Internet (2007) and Melissa Gira Grant’s Playing the Whore (2014).

Throughout the study, Adultwork remained the most referred to platform by interview respondents for facilitating digital sexual services; however, a further nine platforms that facilitated sex work were identified during the interviews. These include Gayswap, a sister platform to Adultwork that brokered services for men buying sex from men; Chaturbate, a webcam-only platform, ranked by Alexa as the third most visited adult platform globally (Alexa, 2019); Cam4, a webcam-only platform, ranked by Alexa as the ninth most visited adult site globally (Alexa, 2019); two less-well-known webcam-only platforms, based in the UK, accessible to women who have been published as glamour models, Glamstars and Onlytease; Studio66, a TV station and web platform; Candy Crib, providing videos, photos and webcam; and finally, Streamate, a popular US webcam platform. In addition, interview respondents named escort platforms (Halo boys, Manchester Lads), pre-recorded ‘amateur’
porn sites (*Manyvids, Allmyfans, Clickbox, Clips4sale*), social media sites (*Twitter, Instagram*), dating apps (*Grindr, Plenty of fish, Fabswingers*) and non-web-based businesses (*Niteflirt*) as part of digital sex markets. Customers of the online survey specified 15 porn sites in relation to their sexual consumption habits. My online ethnography included these platforms, creating memos for each site (see Appendix 1). In this way I was able to identify the different business models adopted by sex work/adult platforms, the overlap of markets, and the range and diversity of erotic content and sexual services available to customers.

The social setting of this study was principally online, and not a ‘bounded social space’ (Hine, 2000: 25) that I could corporeally enter and exit. This meant I never had a feeling I had formally entered or exited the field because the ‘landscape’’s spatial boundary becomes more fluid and it may be difficult to mark the boundaries of the research field site’ (Hesse-Biber and Griffin, 2013: 45). Therefore, my online observations continued, although with less intensity, during the writing-up phase, as I still drew on platforms and websites to substantiate my findings. For instance, in August, 2019, *Adultwork* carried out an overhaul of their legal terms and conditions, adding more governance in the form of policies and statements. This shows the dynamic nature of digital sex markets. The online ethnography provided categories and variables that initially guide the study, but others are allowed and expected to emerge during the study, including an orientation to *constant discovery* and *constant comparison* of relevant situations, settings, styles, images, meanings and nuances (Altheide, 1996: 16 emphasis original).

The data thus generated informed my decisions on recruitment, interview modalities and the interview schedules. It revealed a specific language used by the ‘community’ and provided emergent leads in the ongoing qualitative interviews with both digital sex workers and customers.
3.2.2: Qualitative interviews: Gaining access, approach to interviewing and respondents

As a feminist researcher, I wanted to listen to the narratives of individuals that had lived the experience of selling, buying and organising sexual services in the digital age. It was of paramount importance to me to bring the customers into the analysis, as it was essential to understand a market from both the perspectives of the customer and the worker, as both co-create the exchange (Pettinger, 2015). Furthermore, I am breaking silences in sex work research, as too often men are excluded from studies on sex work as workers and/or customers with the majority of sex work research focussing on women as sex workers.

In the initial research design I included collecting qualitative data from sex industry organisers, as the owners of the means of production; however, for a number of related reasons it proved difficult to access this population. The faceless nature of sex work platforms was a recurrent theme during the interviews with sex workers and customers. It seems this is not uncommon amongst platforms that mediate labour (Meil and Kirov, 2017), but is only heightened for sex work platforms that function in the shadow of criminalisation and stigma, a legally hostile and fragile environment (Sanders and Campbell, 2008). In this context, there is increased reluctance to be interviewed and share information about business operations. It is possible that it is not in the interests of organisers and owners to be interviewed and disclose information about their business models. This is reflected in the limited empirical research on sex industry organisers (for exceptions see Jenkins (2010) on accidental data from sex industry organisers in the UK and Büschi’s 2014 study with brothel owners in Basel, Switzerland).

I adopted the same approach of using online and offline methods to access digital sex workers, customers and sex industry organisers for qualitative interviews. Online, I posted threads on user forums (SAAFE, Mumsnet, Adultwork forum, Punernet and Captain 69) and
on Twitter and sent direct emails to digital sex workers advertising their services on Adultwork and Gayswap (see Appendix 2 for sample email). Offline, I published three advertisements in the classified section of the Evening Standard (1) and The Metro (2) to recruit customers of digitally-mediated sexual services (see Appendix 3 for the advertisement), and distributed leaflets regarding my research to recruit customers of digitally-mediated sexual services sex shops in Soho, London (see Appendix 4 for a copy of the leaflet). In addition, I used snowball sampling, drawing on initial contacts and personal contacts to connect with others. To further contextualise digital sex markets within other sex markets I decided to conduct an expert interview with a representative from a sex work advocacy organisation – Sex Worker Advocacy and Resistance Movement (SWARM). This consolidated findings on the Adultwork platform and I received advice on the organisational structure of digital sex markets.

As shown in Table 3.2, the majority of sex worker respondents were recruited through direct emails on Adultwork. I could not use this recruitment strategy for customers of sex workers as they do not advertise themselves and are largely invisible on digital platforms, apart from customer review sites. Therefore, I also posted an advert on Twitter to access customers; however, this did not result in responses (see Appendix 5).

**Table 3.2: Access to respondents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recruitment strategy</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Digital sex workers</th>
<th>Customers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct email</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online user forums</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper advertisement</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flyers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snowball</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal contact</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was particularly difficult to recruit customers, and therefore, during the later stages of the study, I posted an online survey with the aim of recruiting further respondents.
However, although I received responses to the survey, none of the respondents were willing to take part in qualitative interviews. The difficulties in recruiting to this study are discussed in more detail in the section on the limitations of the study. I also decided early on that I did not want to limit the sample by age, nationality, gender, race, sexuality or length of time engaged in digital sex markets, as I was interested to find out who was engaging in these markets. The only two criteria for respondents were: being over eighteen and buying and/or selling digital sexual services in the UK.

Following the same exploratory approach, I decided to use a loosely structured form of interviewing based on the biographical approach because it would contextualise the digital sex market through the lived experiences of the respondents. As a style of qualitative interviewing, the biographical approach allows respondents to give meaning to their social world by drawing on their own experiences, language and narratives (Bryman, 2008). My approach to interviewing was,

loosely structured forms of interviewing […] relatively informal style […] with a fluid and flexible structure […] from the perspective that knowledge is situated and contextual […] constructed through dialogic (and other) interaction during the interview (Mason, 2002: 62).

I decided to use open-ended questions that focussed on three stages in the lives of the respondents. In the first stage of the interview I asked workers to give a general overview of their lives, providing context and meaning to important events/people/experiences. The second stage focussed on the present, in particular their role in the market of digital sexual services. This stage of the interview was led by the respondents; however, I had a series of themes to approach them with. These included their transition into digital sexual labour, the quality of work, the use of technology, the centrality of the job and their experiences of the industry. The final stage asked the respondents to consider their future, with particular reference to their involvement in sex markets, giving meaning to the respondents’ hopes,
fears and expectations for their future (see Appendix 6 for the interview schedule with digital sex workers).

For the interviews with the customers, I used the same biographical approach, adapting the themes to include consumption behaviour (how often, how much they spent), their use of technology and experiences of sex markets. This approach allowed respondents to lead the interview (see Appendix 7 for the interview schedule for customers). As relatively little is known about digital sex markets, since studies are still in an ‘embryonic phase’ (Sanders et al., 2018a: 36), I wanted the interviews to be broad and for me to be reflexive to the respondents responses, allowing the respondents to describe their behaviour and experiences in their own words.

Using different media (see below), in total I conducted 34 interviews, based on responses from eighteen digital sex workers, five customers and a representative from a SWARM. As discussed in more detail in the subsequent findings chapters, one respondent explicitly identified as both a sex worker and a customer, and two more alluded to having dual roles. In total this resulted in 22 hours of taped interviews – which I transcribed and thematically coded in Nvivo – six email transcripts, two WhatsApp transcripts and one instant messenger transcript – also thematically coded in Nvivo. Table 3.3 and 3.4 provide a summary of the respondents which includes their demographic data, background information and role in sex markets.
Table 3.3: Summary of digital sex workers: demographics, background and role in sex markets.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (pseudonym)</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Platform used</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Relationship status</th>
<th>Sexuality</th>
<th>Background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anita</td>
<td>Phone/text.</td>
<td>Adultwork</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Married with two grown up children.</td>
<td>Identifies as heterosexual.</td>
<td>No other source of income. She began working on Adultwork two years ago.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antonio 2 (one interview)</td>
<td>Various positions in the sex industry including escorting, porn acting and webcamming.</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>White Italian</td>
<td>Single, no children.</td>
<td>Identifies as a homosexual.</td>
<td>Was not currently working as a sex worker, but was working in a sex shop in Soho, London when interviewed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2 Antonio spoke about being a sex worker and a customer and different times in his life, therefore has been included in the data on both digital sex workers and customers of sex workers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (pseudonym)</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Platform used</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Relationship status</th>
<th>Sexuality</th>
<th>Background</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fiona</td>
<td>Escort/webcam/phone.</td>
<td>Adultwork</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Married, three children.</td>
<td>Identifies as heterosexual.</td>
<td>Main source of income. Worked in the sex industry when she was 17 years old. Works with her partner as an escort and webcam.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>Escort/webcam/phone.</td>
<td>Adultwork</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Married to Fiona (above participant), three step-children.</td>
<td>Identifies as bisexual/cross dresser.</td>
<td>Professional full time job. Met Fiona (above) as a client and started to sell sexual services with her.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>Escort/webcam.</td>
<td>Adultwork</td>
<td>Gender Fluid</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Single, no children.</td>
<td>Identifies as homosexual and was assigned male at birth but identifies as gender-fluid choosing to appear as either male or female.</td>
<td>Full time professional job, graduate.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name (pseudonym)</td>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Platform used</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Relationship status</td>
<td>Sexuality</td>
<td>Background</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy (one interview)</td>
<td>Text (previously worked as an escort).</td>
<td>Does not work on a platform. Text company paid per text</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Mixed heritage White British/ Chinese</td>
<td>Married, no children.</td>
<td>Identifies as heterosexual.</td>
<td>Also works as a cleaner and cares for elderly relatives.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megan (two interviews)</td>
<td>‘Glamour’ model/webcam.</td>
<td>Various including Adultwork</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Cohabiting with partner, no children.</td>
<td>Identifies as heterosexual.</td>
<td>No other source of income, graduate. She has been ‘glamour’ modelling and webcamming since she was 18 and is open about her work with family and friends.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul (one interview)</td>
<td>Escort/webcam/phone.</td>
<td>Adultwork/Gayswap</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Single, one child.</td>
<td>Has experience of male/female relationships. Sells sexual services to men.</td>
<td>Full time professional job, home owner. He has been working via platform 1 for ten years selling services predominately to men.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paula (one interview)</td>
<td>Escort/webcam.</td>
<td>Adultwork</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Married, no children.</td>
<td>Identifies as heterosexual.</td>
<td>Sex work as main source of income, and no longer did webcamming. Also works in the family-owned pub.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penelope (one interview)</td>
<td>Webcam/phone/text.</td>
<td>Adultwork</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Long term partner, one child.</td>
<td>Identifies as heterosexual.</td>
<td>Full time professional job. Masters graduate.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name (pseudonym)</td>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Platform used</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Relationship status</td>
<td>Sexuality</td>
<td>Background</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel (two interviews)</td>
<td>Escort/webcam</td>
<td>Adultwork</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Married, two children.</td>
<td>Identifies bisexual and had an ‘open’ relationship.</td>
<td>Full time professional job, graduate, home owner. At the time of the interviews she was not working in the sex industry as she had recently given birth to her second child.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhona (one interview)</td>
<td>Phone/text previously worked as an escort.</td>
<td>Adultwork</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Single with no children.</td>
<td>Identifies as heterosexual.</td>
<td>Works as a ghost writer and started escorting eleven years ago but recently quit escorting.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah (two interviews)</td>
<td>Escort/webcam/phone/text.</td>
<td>Adultwork and night flirt</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Dating, one child.</td>
<td>Identifies as heterosexual.</td>
<td>Sex work as main source of income but still occasionally works as a hairdresser.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sylvia (two interview)</td>
<td>Escort/webcam/phone/text.</td>
<td>Adultwork</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>White Welsh</td>
<td>Divorced with two children.</td>
<td>Identifies as heterosexual.</td>
<td>Retired from teaching several years ago.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 3.4: Summary of customers: demographics, background and role in sex markets.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Customers (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Platform used</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Relationship status</th>
<th>Sexuality</th>
<th>Background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clive</td>
<td>Customer of escorts and webcam services.</td>
<td>Adultwork</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Married, with one child.</td>
<td>Identifies as heterosexual and buys services from women only.</td>
<td>Retired from a career in the city, currently working on a PhD in classics. Consumer of sexual services for 16 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>Customer of webcam and phone services.</td>
<td>Adultwork</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Single, no children.</td>
<td>Identifies as heterosexual and buys services from women.</td>
<td>Works as a cleaner. Accessing services for since he was 18, 15 years ago.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antonio</td>
<td>Customer of webcam, phone and uses dating apps.</td>
<td>Various apps and platforms.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>White Italian</td>
<td>Single, no children.</td>
<td>Identifies as homosexual and buys services from men only.</td>
<td>Works as a tour manager, currently training to be a personal trainer. Has worked as a sex worker previously, and was not currently buying services. First called erotic phone lines when he was a teenager, living with his mother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruce</td>
<td>Customer of escorts, webcam, phone and IM services.</td>
<td>Adultwork and escorting websites</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>Living with current partner. Divorced with two children.</td>
<td>Identifies as “paranoid bisexual”. Buys services from men and women.</td>
<td>Works as a sales manager. Lifetime consumer of sexual services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ali</td>
<td>Customer of escorts, webcam services.</td>
<td>Adultwork</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Married with one child.</td>
<td>Identifies as heterosexual and buys services from women.</td>
<td>Works as an IT consultant. Has a PhD. Has been buying sexual services since he was 18 years old.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.2.3: Digitally-mediated interviews

I decided to offer a range of interview mediums as this reflected the communication technologies used by respondents in their daily lives as workers and/or customers (Hesse-Biber and Griffin, 2013). I assumed respondents were highly capable and regular uses of digital communication technologies because of the work they did and the sexual services they purchased. In addition, offering a range of interview modalities reduced the intrusion into their private lives because of the flexibility and choice it offered respondents. Telephone, email and instant messenger increases the anonymity for respondents, which is potentially of importance for those who may feel concerned about public disclosure due to the social risks associated with commercial sex. I offered respondents interviews through the medium of telephone, Internet calling such as Skype, email, instant messenger, as well as face-to-face interviews. Overall, I felt this opened up the research to more respondents, however, it was not without its problems. For instance, adopting a biographical approach with different interview modalities was not always successful and I had to adapt the interview schedule according to the mode of the interview. I maintained a life-stage approach for all interviews, but in its ‘pure’ form, Plummer (2001) expects biographies to be collected in person, taking between half an hour to three hours. As the table below shows, two interviews were in person, and the majority were conducted using the telephone, generally lasting over an hour. The following section considers the advantages and disadvantages of the interview mediums in detail, as this study embraced innovative online interview techniques, which are worthy of consideration.
Table 3.5: Summary of interview modality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode of Interview</th>
<th>Initial interviews</th>
<th>Follow up interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skype (without video)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face to Face</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instant Messenger</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- WhatsApp</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Adultwork IM</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>24</strong></td>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2.4: Mediated interviews: Telephone interviews

Telephone interviews are not always considered as valid as qualitative interviewing in person (Gillham, 2005; Bryman, 2008; Novick, 2011) because the subtleties of non-verbal communication – such as body language and facial expressions – can be lost, therefore limiting the generation of rich data (Sanders, 2005a; Irvine et al., 2013). Despite my initial scepticism reflecting the concerns in the literature regarding telephone interviews, I found they provided greater privacy and anonymity for the respondents, which benefitted this study because of the sensitive topic of the interviews (Opdenakker, 2006; Trier-Bieniek, 2012), as well as being convenient for the respondents (Irvine et al., 2013). As one participant stated in the initial email exchange:

I think I would rather do it on the phone, just because I have a child that I need to fit in round and public places near to my home tend to be filled with people I know that don’t know my line of work. I hope that is OK (Rachel, aged 31).

Like other researchers who provide personal accounts of conducting telephone interviews, the lack of visual cues was not necessarily problematic (Holt, 2010; Trier-Bieniek, 2012). I found, at times, the lack of visual cues was beneficial to me, as the interviewer, because the content of the interview was often explicit in nature, resulting in me blushing or looking shocked, which in a face-to-face scenario could have terminated that particular line of enquiry. As Opdenakker (2006) argues, the importance of non-verbal cues depends on the
research objectives, in this instance to generate data on a potentially sensitive topic amongst a population group who are comfortable with using the telephone.

The loss of visual cues is considered by some social researchers to hinder building rapport and trust between participant and researcher (Gillham, 2005; Irvine et al., 2013). However, as Trier-Bieniek (2012) argues, people are increasingly relaxed about using communication technologies and in this study the respondents were familiar, comfortable and well-skilled in quickly establishing rapport when communicating via the telephone and other forms of technology. In most cases, I felt confident that rapport had been established, with interviews lasting over an hour, and some respondents agreeing to take part in a second interview. Regarding four of the telephone interviews, an ongoing email conversation between the respondent and myself developed, suggesting there was mutual trust and rapport.

Listening back to the interviews and reflecting on my interviewing skills, I noticed an over-reliance on verbal cues to demonstrate interest and engagement with what was being narrated because I could not rely on unobtrusive non-verbal cues such as nodding in agreement. Holt (2010) acknowledges the challenge to get this right as it is a thin line between too many interjections and reassuring the participant that you are present and listening. However, overall, I found telephone interviews compatible with my choice to use a loosely-structured biographical approach to the interviews. I had to adapt the approach for instant messenger and email interviews because of the brevity of answers given by respondents, although I still followed the three life stages format – overview, present and future, as discussed below.

3.2.5: Mediated interviews: Instant messenger

Using instant messenger – a synchronous form of technology-mediated communication – as a tool to conduct qualitative interviews is a relatively new phenomenon in the social sciences
(Mann and Stewart, 2000; Fontes and O’Mahony, 2008; Pearce et al. 2014), but has been taken up by researchers exploring sensitive or taboo topics because there is greater anonymity and confidentiality than when conducting face-to-face interviews. These include Jenkins’ (2010) study that included sex work managers, Pearce et al.’s (2014) study on women’s experiences of the menopause, and Jowett et al.’s (2011) research with non-heterosexual people’s experiences of chronic illness.

In this study, I decided to use this mode of interview because it was reflective of the digital setting being studied and because it had the potential to increase recruitment to the study, as it offers a convenient and confidential form of communication. Three respondents chose this form of interview: one facilitated by Adultwork’s ‘direct chat’ and two conducted using the popular WhatsApp mobile instant messenger, both offering a dynamic, conversational form of dialogue (Pearce et al., 2013; Fontes and O’Mahoney, 2008), with respondents who may not have taken part in the research otherwise (Jenkins, 2010). In one instance, I was able to conduct a follow-up interview face-to-face with one of the customers who initially only wanted to be interviewed via WhatsApp. I found offering instant messaging as a modality of interviewing opened up this possibility.

The interview conducted through Adultwork’s ‘direct chat’, a form of online instant messenger, was limited to thirty minutes because the participant ‘charged’ me £20 for thirty minutes of her time (see the ethics section for further discussion). This online exchange was synchronous with both parties appearing to dedicate our full attention to the interview, whereas the interviews facilitated by WhatsApp took place over several days. Conducting interviews via instant messaging is highly mobile and, like telephone interviewing, the researcher is unsure of the interviewee’s environment, which led to the interruption of the interview process on several occasions. For example, both respondents were at work whilst messaging. At times I was unsure what else they were engaging in. Therefore, it was not fully
synchronous despite the technology-enabling synchronicity. As argued by Dennis et al. (2008) and Salmons (2016), synchronous/asynchronous is a continuum rather than a dichotomy that depends on the parties’ full attention and the technology mobilised. For example, the two WhatsApp interviews were at times synchronous, where messages were sent back and forth within minutes, but at other times the communication was asynchronous with time lags of eight - ten hours between responses. The respondents would notify me that they had other commitments and would restart the interviews when they were next available. The interview with Suzie took place over five days, with us both coming back to the conversation when available.

Overall, I found this mode of interview unsatisfactory for a qualitative study because the data generated was partial and did not provide the wealth of information given in the telephone, Skype and face-to-face interviews because answers were short. This impacted my decision to develop the research design to include data from autobiographical books and blogs written by sex workers to further my knowledge and understanding on the experiences and behaviours of digital sex workers and customers. However, had I not given the choice to respondents to be interviewed via instant messaging, they may not have taken part in the research.

3.2.6: Mediated interviews: Email

Emails are based on asynchronous interactions, as the researcher and the participant expect there to be a time lag between message and response (Salmons, 2016). Using emails for in-depth interviews rather than surveys or structured interviews is relatively unusual within sociology (Hesse-Biber and Griffin, 2013; Farrell and Peterson, 2010). I decided to include email interviews in this study because, like other mediated interview modes, they are increasingly being used in studies that aim to gain a better understanding of an online
phenomenon (for example, Madge and O’Connors, 2002; Biddix and Park, 2008; Jenkins, 2010). In addition, using email interviewing has the same advantages as telephone and instant messaging interviews because of the visual anonymity and convenience for respondents (Mann and Stewart, 2000; Meho, 2006; Opdenakker, 2006).

Two of the respondents chose to conduct the interview using email with varied outcomes and four were contacted via email after a telephone or face-to-face interview for further information. As suggested in the literature, email interviews result in high drop-out rates compared to other modes of interviewing (Meho, 2006; Bryman, 2008), arguably because of the time lag in communication, resulting in more time commitment than is typical in a face-to-face or telephone interview. In addition, as an online researcher, I had less control over respondents choosing to withdraw from the interview, as it can simply be brought to an end by a click of a button (Salmons, 2016: 49).

Three potential respondents offered to conduct an email interview but did not respond once the interview began. Furthermore, the interview with Brett was not satisfactorily completed, with him dropping out from the process without explanation. Although it can be difficult to establish rapport when interviewing via email (Mann and Stewart, 2000; Opdenakker, 2006), I did achieve this with the email interview with James, a customer of digital sexual services. The interview was carried out intermittently over four weeks and generated intimate data. In this case, James claimed to be shy, therefore email interviewing may have allowed for greater disclosure (Meho, 2006; Hesse-Biber, 2013). I drew loosely on the biographical approach for this interview, asking him about his past, present and future, but the information was not detailed enough to be described as a biography, although the data was intimate and thoughtful.

The decision to use different interview media reflected the behaviours of the population group, gaining insight into how these media are used to communicate (Hine,
2015). However, this meant some interviews yielded richer data than others, but all of them helped me to build an ethnographic understanding of the market for digitally-mediated sexual services.

3.2.7: Online survey and data mining

As noted, I decided to produce an online survey, distributed through my Twitter account as a way to generate additional data on customers (see Appendix 8 for the survey design). The survey included a mix of quantifiable questions and qualitative responses and would take 5-10 minutes to complete. I had hoped it would produce further respondents for qualitative interviews, but none of the 22 respondents were willing to take part in further interviews. The data shows that the majority of respondents identified as heterosexual men in employment, and were more likely than not to be in a relationship. This fits with findings from the qualitative data. (See Appendix 9 for an overview of the sample).

In July 2017, I decided to ‘validate offline findings’ (Hesse-Biber and Griffin, 2013: 44), through data exploration from Adultwork, the leading multi-service adult platform. As mentioned earlier, with technical support, it was possible to generate ‘big data’ on this platform through an automated collection of digital transactional data and then mining the data sets for patterns (Hine, 2015). As shown in Table 5, the data confirmed the following: the geographical market of the platform was predominantly in the UK; there is a high prevalence of people selling escorting services; there is a duality of provision of online and offline sexual services; sex workers offer a portfolio of services; and the approximate number of digital sex workers on this particular platform. We also mined quantitative data regarding the demographics of the population, but this was not reliable because data entered onto the platform was not compulsory; therefore, the data was not consistent across profiles, which invalidated the overall picture.
Table 3.6: Breakdown of services provided by ‘members’ of Adultwork

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Services provided detail</th>
<th>Members/ respondents on Adultwork</th>
<th>number</th>
<th>per cent</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Webcam only</td>
<td></td>
<td>722</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webcam + Phone</td>
<td></td>
<td>552</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webcam + IM</td>
<td></td>
<td>167</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webcam + Escorting</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,027</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webcam + Phone + IM</td>
<td></td>
<td>933</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webcam + IM + Escorting</td>
<td></td>
<td>175</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webcam + Phone + Escorting</td>
<td></td>
<td>902</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webcam + Phone + IM + Escorting</td>
<td></td>
<td>818</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone only</td>
<td></td>
<td>70</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone + IM</td>
<td></td>
<td>67</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone + Escorting</td>
<td></td>
<td>394</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone + IM + Escorting</td>
<td></td>
<td>209</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IM only</td>
<td></td>
<td>477</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IM + Escorting</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,346</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escorting only</td>
<td></td>
<td>17,475</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>25,334</strong></td>
<td>100</td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.7: Summary of services provided on Adultwork

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Services provided</th>
<th>Members/ respondents on Adultwork</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>per cent</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Digitally-mediated sexual services (excluding escorting)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,988</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escorting and digitally-mediated sexual services</td>
<td></td>
<td>4,871</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escorting only</td>
<td></td>
<td>17,475</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>25,334</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>19</strong>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This number includes the respondent who explicitly identified as both a sex worker and a customer.
3.3: Data analysis

Although this is not a grounded theory study, I am influenced by Charmaz’s (2014) approach to analysing qualitative data. Thus, I did not leave the analysis to the end of the data collection phase, but rather I wrote memos throughout the research process to develop ideas and initial codes. Furthermore, I developed codes based on the actions of respondents, what was happening in their descriptions; for example, ‘accessing online markets’, ‘safeguarding via platforms’ and ‘attending to conflicting identities’. By doing this I was able to see where there were gaps in the data, and pursue new ideas in the interviews to follow; for example, exploring the idea that digital sex workers can also be customers of sexual services and goods, something I had not considered before beginning the research.

After the data collection phase, where I developed initial codes alongside the memos, I used Nvivo to code thematically transcripts of twenty-two hours of taped interviews, two email interviews, two WhatsApps and Adultwork ‘direct chat’ exchanges, and blog entries from two sex workers. Using a thematic approach meant I was able to develop themes across data sources, and make links and interconnections. At this point, I was able to start writing draft findings chapters, developing my theoretical arguments from the earlier memos and making connections across the data.

Initially I took an interpretative approach to analysis, but in the later stages of analysis I was more reflexive. I did this by following Charmaz’s (2008; 2014; 2017) approach, after writing draft chapters, I went back to the data and coded the qualitative interviews line by line. I used codes developed in the initial coding and thematic coding, but developed analytical codes as I saw categories, themes and relationships between the data developing. At this stage, the printed copies of the interview transcripts, blog transcripts, notes from online observations and memos became visual documents, annotated, highlighted and coded. I then became more selective when entering the codes in Nvivo.
3.4: Ethics

There are ethical standards for all social research that must be met and I have maintained the principles of ethical sociological research as stipulated by the University of Essex’s Guidelines of Ethical Approval (2014) and the Statement of Ethical Practice for the British Sociological Association (British Sociological Association, 2017), adapting the principles to digital settings, making ethical judgements throughout the research process (Snee, 2013). The key principles that have guided this research can be categorised into the following themes: protecting all respondents from harm, obtaining appropriate informed consent, ensuring the confidentiality of respondents and maintaining professional integrity.

Furthermore, this study is located in principles and ethics which I view as being common to all feminist methodologies. Feminist research brings women into debates on issues that affect them who may otherwise be excluded and/or silenced. A feminist researcher respectfully collects data by putting the respondents at the centre of ethical and practical decisions and acknowledges the diversity of experiences and the intersection of gender power dynamics with other categories of identity such as race, age, class and sexuality (Stanley and Wise, 2008; Hesse-Biber, 2012). In line with the feminist approach taken in this research, I gave careful consideration to the ethical issues relating to how I conducted the research and my responsibility towards participants.

As a ‘lurker’ to message boards and sex work platforms, I engaged with the ethical discussions regarding covert ‘lurking’ in online communities for data collection. Lurkers by definition lurk, and do not respond to the postings of respondents, even when the participant is an ethnographer (Hine, 2000). What is considered public and private in online spaces and, therefore, when informed consent should be obtained has been widely discussed (Hine, 2000; Markham and Buchanan, 2012; Snee, 2013; Kozinets, 2015; Salmons, 2016; Davies and
Halford, 2017). Kozinets (2015), author of Netography, argues that researchers should not ‘lurk’, but rather fully disclose their presence, attentions and affiliations to any online community they are observing and should seek permission (informed consent) from the users before using any specific postings. I take a more pragmatic and nuanced approach to ‘lurking’ than Kozinets and argue, in this context, that fully disclosing my presence in all of the online forums could have altered the research setting and was unnecessary in protecting the privacy of the users. Drawing on the discussions of online ethics, I took a contextual approach, observing the interactions and comments made by users, as those that use advice-seeking forums are aware it is a public space. The data from online threads in advice-seeking communities and sex worker profiles provided valuable insights for answering the research questions without compromising the privacy of the online users or causing them harm.

In protecting users’ privacy, I decided not to include any verbatim quotes from any online content unless given specific permission to do so, in order to protect the privacy of the respondents because doing so risks their privacy. It is usually easy to trace the source of any verbatim quotation and find the identity of the user, by simply entering the quote into a search engine (Hine, 2000; Davies and Halford, 2017). As argued by online ethnographers, informed consent is an ongoing process rather than an isolated event (Hine, 2000; Salmons, 2016) and it is the responsibility of the researcher to ‘engage in a reflexive and sensitive moral research practice’ (Mason, 2002: 82).

The British Sociological Association guidelines on the ethics of digital research (Davies and Halford, 2017) and Snee (2013) question whether it is intrusive for a social researcher to contact potential respondents through a member site like Adultwork. To minimise harm, I made a list of all 250 emails sent via Adultwork, ensuring each recipient only received a maximum of two brief emails. However, I took the same approach I had
taken to ‘lurking’: those who advertise services on platforms, such as Adultwork, are aware it is a public space for communication, but that it is still vital to respect their privacy.

Hine (2015) suggests some sociologists are suspicious of collecting big data and incorporating it into a qualitative research project, in part because of concerns regarding informed consent. In this context, it would be highly impractical and almost impossible to get individual informed consent from all ‘members’ of Adultwork. However, it is suggested by Markham and Buchanan, (2012) of the Association of Internet Researchers that permission should be gained from the website before data mining begins. In the process of trying to interview the owners of Adultwork I had made them aware of my research, although I had not explicitly referred to data mining. They did not respond to the email and therefore no dialogue with Adultwork ensued. However, protecting the members was important, therefore, as soon as the data was extracted, identifying fields such as the sex worker’s pseudonym were removed immediately. Once checked for double profiles, the unique user id was also removed from the database before analysis.

Following advice from experienced sex work researchers and sex worker organisations, I decided to remunerate digital sex workers for their time. Furthermore, I come from a youth work background where it is commonplace to remunerate young people if they take part in social research, so it felt appropriate and respectful to do so. It felt less appropriate to reimburse the customers because of their role as a consumer rather than worker, so I decided not to do so. This may have influenced the higher recruitment of sex workers compared to customers. Based on this, when I conducted the online survey I decided to reimburse customers for their time. The online survey did yield a higher responses rate than earlier attempts to recruit customers.

There is some discussion amongst social researchers on the appropriateness of reimbursing respondents, although it may be more commonplace than the literature suggests
(Head, 2009). The sex work researchers who advised me it was good practice have not published about remunerating respondents. Amongst social researchers there are concerns that a high payment could impact free informed consent (Head, 2009); however, I offered a £20 gift voucher to digital sex workers. It was a token of gratitude rather than a full reimbursement of their time.

One participant offered thirty minutes on Adultwork’s direct chat for £20. She kindly lowered her rates so we could ‘chat’ for that amount of time. I was reluctant to spend my research budget contributing to Adultwork profit margins, as 30 per cent of all transactions go to Adultwork. I highlighted this to the participant, but she was still keen to go ahead with the interview in this format, rather than receiving a £20 gift voucher. This is discussed further in the reflections and reflexivity section of this chapter.

3.5: Limitations of the study: Access and sample

It is noted by sex work researchers (Shaver, 2005; Sanders, 2006; Cusick et al., 2009; Sanders et al., 2017b) that, for a number of reasons, it is challenging to generate a sample of sex workers and/or clients of sex workers that is not biased. The size and boundaries of the population are unknown; therefore, it is not possible to generate a sample frame on which to base the sample (Cusick et al., 2009; Sanders, 2006). As noted, according to data from the 2001 British National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (Natsal), 13 per cent of men³ have paid for sex once in their lives, and from analysing the data from the survey, Della Giusta et al. (2009) has concluded that men from all social classes, economic income and life stages may pay for sex. However, this data does not include those who buy digitally-mediated sex services and therefore does not provide a sample frame for this study. The data mined from Adultwork gives some indication of the size of the population that sells services

³ This survey only asked men the question.
(See Table 5 and 6), but this does not take into account other online platforms and offline modalities, nor the transient nature of the population. The size and demographics of the population of those buying and selling digital sexual services remains unknown.

A sample bias is highly likely because I have drawn on self-selection, convenience and snowball sampling. As a result, the sample is biased to those who want to talk, or confess their sexual habits and this may be atypical of the population due to the stigma and secrecy that overshadows the sex industry (Shaver, 2005). Two respondents noted their atypical characteristics and were motivated to take part in the research to challenge age and class assumptions regarding sex workers:

Be pleased to speak to you. You won’t find me the same as others, I really am a retired schoolteacher, 60 next week!!!! (email from Sylvia)

I think it is important for girls like me to be represented in research as I have a good education and come from if anything a privileged background. I was in no way forced or even encouraged into this work (email from Rachel).

Following the discussion on sample bias, it was not possible to form a representative sample; however, the sample appears particularly unrepresentative regarding ethnicity, as all sex workers, apart from one, identified as white British. When I saw this pattern occurring in the data, I sent targeted emails to those who identified as ‘people of colour’ on Adultwork and I approached two black feminist organisations for advice on recruiting participants to the study, but the sample remained predominately white British. The white Britishness of the sample could be partly due to the recruitment methods employed, given that the majority of the respondents were recruited through Adultwork which has a verification process that is particularly strict for certain nationalities, creating barriers for some migrant sex workers. The platform states: ‘Members from certain countries, (e.g. Albania, Romania, Russia, Latvia & Ukraine), will need to meet additional verification and ID requirements before being allowed to offer services on the Site’ (Adultwork, 2015). This might be because Adultwork
have concerns regarding police scrutiny where modern slavery and trafficking is suspected (Cunningham et al., 2018).

In addition, I did not advertise the research in languages other than English. Both these factors will have contributed to the lack of diversity in the sample. But I suggest that the data sample and the narratives of customers and workers indicate that in this digital context, a greater value is put on white, native English-speaking digital sex workers by customers. More research enquiring into race and nationality on digital sexual labour is required; however, as mentioned in the literature review chapter, research in the US found race and nationality of digital sex workers does have an impact on the economic success of webcam models, and that there is ‘white privilege at work in the world of online sex work’ (Jones, 2015b: 794). As with other forms of service work, some bodies are more profitable than others (Hardy, 2013).

The limitations of the sample, as outlined, had an impact on my decision to adopt a constructivist grounded theory approach. This study relied on an opportunistic sample because of the context of the population being studied, rather than a theoretical approach based on criteria associated with categories that emerged from the data (Charmaz, 2014). In the language of a grounded theorist, I did not reach saturation point with the data regarding customers of digital sexual services, as there are limited alternative sources for data than interviews.

At several times during the data collection phase, and through to the analysis, I considered not including customers in the study because of the small sample. However, I decided the consumer component of the market remained an important part of the overall analysis of this sexual digital market, illuminating the complexities of the interconnections between production, consumption and regulation (Pettinger, 2015). To that end I persevered, and in the final year of the project created an online survey that was distributed on Twitter,
following the examples of Sanders et al. (2018b) – who had a large response to an online survey with customers – and Jenkins (2010) (see Appendix 9). I collected quantitative data and included questions that allowed for more qualitative answers. I also requested a follow up interview, but it did not result in more interviews. However, I was satisfied I had tried all avenues available to me to recruit customers of digital sexual services. Very little is known about this group of consumers, so despite the small sample this study contributes to sex work research and meets the challenge of scholars Minichiello et al. (2013), who claim that, too often, men, as buyers and sellers, are excluded from sex work research.

I decided to interview sex industry organisers, as the producers of sex markets, but it proved difficult to access this population. A recurrent theme in the interviews with sex workers and customers was the faceless nature of digital platforms. This is not uncommon amongst platforms that mediate labour, which is heightened by platforms that mediate sex work. In this context, there is increased reluctance to be interviewed and share information about business operations. This section of the sex industry is not illegal, but it operates in a legally hostile and fragile environment (Sanders and Campbell, 2008).

3.6: Reflexivity and reflections

This section of the methodology chapter seeks to consider and examine how my position as a female, heterosexual, white, middle-class and able-bodied researcher with access to education, housing, health care and other securities influenced the data collected, the stories told and the theories put forward. Reflexive accounts are at risk of being nothing more than self-indulgent descriptions of individual’s personal experience of the research process (Sanchez Taylor and O’Connell Davidson: 2010). Yet, the reflexive turn in social research originated out of concerns that researchers were not positioning themselves in the research process and identifying the impact of power, personal values, experiences and judgements on
knowledge production (see Oakley, 1990, 2016; Skeggs, 1995, 2002). Thus, it is not so much my identity that is important here (which in any case is not fixed) but rather, how the researcher’s privileges and access to power informs and influences the research process. If I do not consider my own position within the research, I am assuming the knowledge I produce is done so in a void without context. In this section, I argue that context, the researcher’s, and the respondents’ positionality work together to co-create the knowledge produced. In the reflexive act of acknowledging what power dynamics are at play, I do not seek to eradicate them, but rather show how this has influenced the research process. As Skeggs writes,

> It is the tendency to think that the problems of power, privilege and perspective can be dissolved by inserting one’s self into the account and proclaiming that reflexivity has occurred in practice. Telling and doing are two very different forms of activity (2002: 13).

The following section explores the complexities of gendered power relations during research interviews and acknowledges the dynamic and fluid nature of gender relations. The context, content and positionality of the researcher and researched will influence the power dynamics. This is explored with examples from interviews with men in this study. It is often assumed that men have power over women, particularly in commercial sex encounters where the woman can be assumed to be a victim and the man a perpetrator of violence. However, my research has shown me that power is more complicated and dynamic. This reflexive account begins by considering how the data was co-created in the interview by exploring what stories are told and what remains unsaid. This is followed by an example of how gender played out in an interview with a man who sold sex. I then consider my position as a consumer-researcher, watching webcam shows and buying tokens for Adultwork. I finish by moving the discussion onto power and privilege in the analysis phase of the study.
3.6.1 Co-creating data in the interview

I recognise that the stories told in interviews are partial (Plummer, 1995) and given that buying and selling sexual services are often behaviours that remain largely secret, it may be the first time that respondents’ are discussing their involvement in sex markets. Some aspects of the participants’ stories may remain undisclosed (Plummer, 1995) and as a researcher who has not previously purchased or sold sexual services, it may also be the first time that I was hearing these sexual stories. Yet, from a researcher’s perspective it is not possible to assess what parts of the story remain unsaid (Sanchez Taylor and O’Connell Davidson, 2010). The first interview I conducted in the study provides a good example of this.

The interview with Rachel took place on the telephone, thus creating a bodily distance between the researcher and researched due to the barrier technology provided. On several occasions throughout the interview, I found myself blushing, the embodied response of embarrassment and shame. At the time, and for some time afterwards, I was grateful for the barrier provided by technology assuming the participants could not read my affective responses because they could not see my bodily reactions. However, re-reading the transcripts for this reflexive section, I realised that the telephone does not hide my embarrassment as Rachel responded to my emotional discomfort. In the following extract of the interview with Rachel, I blush when she dismisses my understanding of ‘kinky’.

Rachel: I charge more if I do kinky practices.

Helen: What do you mean by kinky? Anal?

Rachel: Anal isn’t kinky. I am a bit desensitised to kinky. Anal is typical. I am surprised when they don’t want anal. They can request things like wearing a watch, a coat, something dull like a cagoule.

I am embarrassed when Rachel recognises my lack of understanding of her sexual world. In my attempt to be a sex work scholar, I had not wanted to appear sexually naive or ‘vanilla’ in
my understanding of sexual practices and desires. Rachel works hard to soften the disjuncture in our sexual knowledge and experiences. This is a good example of how researchers and respondents co-produce the data, telling sexual stories together (Plummer, 1995). Had my response been closer to her understanding of ‘kinky’ then she may have revealed quite different desires from customers and told different stories. As a result, she tells stories of ‘dull’ and not directly sexual requests; examples she assumes I will find palatable: ‘Like wearing a watch, a coat, something dull like a cagoule’. Drawing on my observations of digital sex work platforms it is unlikely that these are the most ‘kinky’ requests that Rachel had received.

Grenz (2010) argues that the researcher is part of the development of the story and interview respondents alter their stories according to what they think the interviewer wants to hear/can bear, how the story will be interpreted and how the story will be interpreted by the wider public. I cannot assert what Rachel would have told me had she not sensed my embarrassment. Nevertheless, by re-reading the interview transcript, I can see that she does employ emotional labour to make me feel more comfortable and explain away the disjuncture.

I used a constructive grounded theory approach to analyse the data, therefore, I made memos immediately after the interview. I was able to see that sharing my own understanding of concepts and terminology was dangerous territory during an interview as I could be easily caught off-guard. This experience was a useful lesson to ensure I asked participants, ‘Can you tell me what you mean by that?’ Rather than assuming I had a shared understanding with the respondent.
3.6.2: Reflections on interviewing men

It was essential to this study to include men, as customers and workers, as the research sought to understand digital sex markets from a consumption and a labour perspective. People of all genders are actors in digital sex markets. Yet, at times it felt counterintuitive as a feminist to be interviewing men, particularly men who in some feminist ontologies would be conceptualised as perpetrators of violence against women (MacKinnon, 1989; Farley, 2004; Jeffreys 2009; Coy et al., 2012; Bindel, 2017). At the same time, it could also be argued that including customers into the study follows a feminist tradition of making the personal political, bringing the so-called private into the public sphere; for example, Ann Oakley’s (1974) study of housework, Carol Smart’s research on the family (e.g. Smart and Shipman, 2004) and Arlie Hochschild’s sociology of emotions (1983). Paying for sex online is mostly a private encounter that takes place in the home and a consumer behaviour that is often interpreted as shameful and secretive. By including men in the research, I was inviting uncertainty. I was committing to what I did not know, and what was not comfortable for me as a woman researcher whose primary interests were the working conditions of digital sex workers. Yet, ‘feminist research must include all aspects of social reality and all participants in it’ (Stanley and Wise, 1993: 31). Avoiding men in feminist research will not lead to full understanding and transformation of gendered power relations. Throughout the study I was reflexive about my position as a woman and how this was influencing the interviews and analysis.

As Oakley (2016) and others assert, the researcher has power in the interview as they have control over the structure of the interview, what happens to the data and how it is presented to the public. However, power is not held exclusively by the interviewer. Power is more complex and dynamic, particularly when women are interviewing men. In the same way, power is not held exclusively by men over women. Yet, in a patriarchal, capitalist
political economy masculine discourses do hold more power than ones of femininity (Connell, 2000; Pini, 2005). It appeared Calvin found my position of power uncomfortable and reacted by asserting his masculinity through accounts of his sexual prowess and challenging my specialist knowledge. For example:

Calvin: Have you heard of adult friend finder?
Helen: No I haven’t
Calvin: What are you studying? Have you not looked at all these sites?

He goes on to explain the different sites he uses to get free sex. He continues:

Calvin: If I want to have sex every day, three times a day, with three different women, with them, or with their partners, or their fuck buddy bloke, or whatever they want to call it I can. It is possible to do because of who I am and what I do. And that is not available to most men.

Throughout the telephone interview he adopted a sexually aggressive mode actively resisting the power imbalance in the research relationship. Calvin self-identified as ‘straight’, yet sold erotic massages and webcam shows to men. He may have felt that, in this position, his masculine identity was being challenged and I was objectifying him. He wanted his sexual story to be one of heterosexual masculine sexual power and knowledge, not of homosexuality. Hollway and Jefferson’s (2000) concept of the ‘defended subject’ is useful in making sense of both Calvin’s and my feelings of defensiveness. They suggest that people experience anxiety when they feel their identities are being challenged. In this context, Calvin may have felt the need to defend his heterosexual masculine identity by repeatedly discussing his sexual and physical prowess. In the following extract he elaborates his ‘straightness’ in relation to selling sex to men.

Helen: How does it work with erm... how do you feel about, if you are straight, then how do you feel about having male customers.

Calvin: That works very easy for me. They get erect very quickly, they want to see my cock. They can't see my cock because I am straight. So there is a technical imbalance. So for example, I had a guy on Thursday who said suck my cock. I said ok you can pay me £1,000 to suck my cock but you'll be sucking a very small willy. Surely you want a hard penis to suck, cos chemically men don’t do it for me. If I wanted to get an erection for a man I couldn’t. Believe you me I wish I could.
Helen: Right

Calvin: Because I would be loaded right now. I would be very, very rich. And I wouldn’t be living in this country. So I would be loaded. If I could get an erection for a guy then the world is my oyster. I am about as straight as they come. I love women. You know. But I can turn a man on as easily as I can turn a woman on. It is easier to turn a man on, easier. It takes me an hour to make a woman to cum properly, it takes 5 minutes to make a man cum properly.

I suggest that the stories told by Calvin were heavily influenced by my gender and assumed heterosexuality, as well as my access to education. Thus, the knowledge and data generated was co-created with the researcher and was not produced with neutrality and detachment. If Calvin had been interviewed by a man, he may not have felt the need to assert his sexual prowess with women, emphasising his ‘success’ and sexual skill as a heterosexual man. At times it felt like Calvin was selling his sexual ‘abilities’ to me as an assumed heterosexual woman in a monogamous relationship. Did he view me as a woman who potentially would buy his sexual services? A woman in ‘need’ of his services? My experience reflects Huysamen’s (2018) account of interviewing men who pay for sex; the researcher’s professional identity does not override the researcher’s identity as a woman. Fundamentally the researcher and researched relationship is a social relation, thus the social structures will have some effect on the data produced (Bourdieu, 1996).

I re-read my field notes and realised that I had experienced anxiety as a defended subject. He had been dismissive of my intellectual ability, questioning my knowledge on the research topic. He also challenged my sexual and intimate lifestyle, albeit indirectly and not personally, as my personal experiences were not discussed with Calvin. His opinion of heterosexual monogamous relationships was negative, believing them to be unrealistic, based on untruths and ultimately unhappy. In the following extracts from my research diary, it is evident that I feel defensive and want to protect what I value.
He believes he is the answer to all women’s prays but they just don’t know it yet. It is pretty hard work listening to a man who feels women are so easily conned or only require a ‘good fuck’ by him. He seems to believe that there is no other dimension to intimacy. It is sad.

In the interview you can tell at times I feel like he is trying to give me the hard sell. He is forceful in his answers and dismissive of how others live, particularly those in committed/monogamous relationships. He seems jaded by how deceitful people can be.

Yet, at the same time, I am reluctant to reflect on how this made me question my own values and judgements of relationships and intimacy. His attitudes were challenging and made me question my own value system. Perhaps I was naïve to think heterosexual men and women can be truthful in a monogamous relationship? This taps into my own insecurities and becomes deeply personal, best kept to the therapist room rather than a PhD thesis. I take comfort from the experiences of Sanchez Taylor and O’Connell Davidson who argue that sometimes silence is golden. Research that focusses on such ‘difficult and emotionally charged territory’ (2010: 51) that intersects with our personal sexual and emotional biographies is complicated. Hashing this out in academic writing might be too personal and in danger of becoming narcissistic.

3.6.3: Online observations as an erotic experience

I have been reluctant to write about my embodied sensations whilst observing sex work platforms due to fear that my writing becomes too personal, wavering on unprofessional and narcissistic. Yet, as part of a tradition of Plummer’s (1995) telling of sexual stories, it would be a disloyalty to the research process to exclude my own sexual responses when observing sex work platforms.

As a relatively new method and research topic, little has been written about the embodied sensations of desire, distaste and discomfort of the researcher who engages in online ethnographic observations of sex work websites and platforms. Some scholars have
written critical reflections of ethnographic participant observations of the sex industry (Pilcher, 2017; Groes-Green, 2019) recognising the value of immersing themselves in the field and also experiencing conflicting affective and bodily responses when participating in arenas of sexual commerce. Pilcher comments on observing strip shows that she ‘was both uncomfortable with and enjoyed it at the same time’ (2017:60). Online ethnographic observations of sex work platforms, often streaming live sex shows, produced affective responses in me. These ranged from bemusement, desire and erotic embodied sensations to concern for the worker’s well-being resulting in discomfort and the physical need to ‘log off’ and do something different. Something I was able to do from my privileged position as a researcher. For example, I observed a digital sex worker who was had already started a show when I logged on at 9am. Her performance involved masturbating with a mechanical dildo. Throughout the day I clicked back into her show. At 5pm, when I had finished the days’ work, I was interested to see she was still working. I hoped that the film was a loop, as the alternative seemed too sore and painful.

Unlike ethnography in a physical space, where the researcher is present with the participants, where both respond to the context and content of the field, I could log off and no one would notice. In this research context, I was a voyeur not interacting with the workers, not unlike the customers who browsed sex work platforms for pleasure. I took on the role of consumer-researcher. For the interview with Rhona, I further engaged in the role as consumer-researcher by purchasing tokens on Adultwork’s instant messaging system so we could conduct the interview. To some extent, this experience gave me an insight into the excitement of being a customer of digital sexual services. I found it thrilling buying the tokens, wondering if the transaction would show up on my bank statement and trying to get as much information from the participants as I could in thirty minutes. In addition to paying for her time, she also requested I left a review on her Adultwork page. In the email exchange
prior to the interview, Rhona sets the terms and conditions in a manner that was suitable for my role as consumer-researcher.

Just email me the exact time you're looking to come online and I will reduce my private rate to 0.70. I only discuss lawful topics and will ask for feedback after our session, I hope that is all okay with you.

Rhona expected an income and a review from me, as she would from other consumers wanting her time. The relationship between the researcher and the participant is not equal, however, in this exchange Rhona went someway to address this imbalance by receiving an income and a professional endorsement for her time.

3.6.4: Reflexivity and analysis

I followed Charmaz’s (2008; 2014; 2017) constructivist grounded theory approach to data analysis. After writing draft chapters, I went back to the data and coded the qualitative interviews line by line. This gave me a chance to ensure I had not missed any themes or other issues that I may not have already considered. Furthermore, this allowed for me to take step back and develop a more critical and analytical approach, rather than assuming the world views of the respondents without question. This was particularly important with the interviews with customers.

Overall, men respondents presented their behaviour through a lens of pathology. They were acting out ‘addictive behaviour’ and it was framed as ‘out of their control’. In the first drafts of analysis, I found it too easy to assert normative labels to men who buy sex, such as ‘pervert’ and ‘pathetic’, adopting and not questioning their own reasoning for buying sex. I knew this was not the full story but with a limited sample, I struggled to claim to know what their stories were. My own preconceptions were founded in this context and reinforced by scholars, colleagues and friends who were also dismissive and convinced that men who buy sex are displaying some kind of pathological behaviour as either perversion or addiction. This
is also linked to my own position as a woman in a heterosexual relationship. Four of the men interviewed were in long term heterosexual relationships and their partners/wives were not explicitly aware of this aspect of their sexual behaviour.

When I wrote the second drafts of the analysis chapters, I began to see where my positionality influenced my reading of their sexual stories. I began to see the complexities in their presentation of their sexual selves. I did this through a close exploration of the interactions, language, actions, as well as the silences in the accounts of the research participants and acknowledged the impact my privileges and preconceptions have on the ‘research reality’ (Charmaz, 2014: 13). As is commonly agreed in feminism, social constructions of gender and sexuality place limits and boundaries on all genders. The men interviewed were restricted by social constructs that often reject men who do not always identify, practice or desire sex with women. Calvin, although not a customer, presented a sexuality that did not fit into binary presentations of sexuality, ‘gay’ or ‘straight’, despite his best efforts to confirm a binary position stating ‘I am as straight as they come’. Paul also resisted the binary position on sexuality and did not ‘label’ his sexuality, whereas Bruce was so conflicted by his sexual desires and practices that he only described himself as ‘gay’ by referring to a third person.

Helen: How would you describe your sexuality?

Bruce: Confused. I guess you could say paranoid bisexual. I’m just so confused. Certain things I like. I get very nervous in the company of men, if I am gay that would be stupid. I love the company of women. I still have built up a number of female friendships. I can sit down and chat to all day long and talk about absolutely everything. I have been told by two or three people that I am gay. The reason being is that I listen to them I notice things about them. I talk to their faces, I don’t talk to their boobs.

Helen: Have you purchased services from men?

Bruce: Yes I have.
These examples show that witnessing what is not being said in the interview, and why not, is vitally important to data analysis. My reading of the interview data was primarily interpretive, but in the later stages of analysis it became more reflexive, thus considering not only my own positionality in the co-creation of data, but also the broader context the research took place in.

Throughout the research process I worked reflexively, considering my position on the data generated during interviews and analysis. This section sought to present how power relations during interviews cannot be assumed and are not unidirectional. Rather, power relations in interviews are fluid and reflect the social structures and context in which the interviews take place. I used a number of examples to explore the dynamics of power in the interview process. Firstly, Rachel sought to address the power imbalance that our mismatched understanding of ‘kinky’ brought to the interview. Secondly, Calvin used his gender to assert masculine discourses of sexual and physical power and dismissed my academic knowledge to gain power in the interview shifting the objectification onto me rather than him. Thirdly, Rhona went some way to address the disparity between researcher and researcher by receiving money for her time and an online endorsement. Finally, I considered how reflexivity was vital to the analysis of men who pay for sex. By reflecting on the power relations within interviews with men conducted by women, I could understand the complexities and dynamism of power dynamics between men who pay for sex and sex workers. Power is not a fixed, one-way relation. Reflecting on this forced me to look beyond the narratives of addiction and pathology and consider why they relied on these labels to make sense of their sexual consumption.
3.7: Conclusion

As I have outlined in this chapter, researching sex markets is not easily done because of the limitations regarding the size of the population and the desire to often remain ‘hidden’ due to the stigma associated with commercial sex. I selected the method and sources of data most appropriate to achieve the research aims, understanding digital sex markets through the technological architecture, the regulatory framework, consumption practices and behaviours, and the working lives of digital sex workers. Using a multi-method approach, grounded in an ethnographic enquiry, allowed me to trace the interconnection of online and offline spheres in terms of work, consumption, sexuality, eroticism, regulation and the market. The process of creating memos throughout the research process helped me to achieve the research aims, building an overall picture of digital sex markets. The thematic analysis employed for the qualitative interviews, digital documentaries, blogs and autobiographies was the most appropriate for these data sources. Using simple quantitative data from online sources was innovative and corroborated the qualitative findings. This study is founded in feminist principals of respect, reflexivity and challenging women’s oppression where it exists. This research project provides a detailed analysis of digital sex markets in the UK.
Chapter Four: Technological developments and the organisation of digital sex markets

4.1: Introduction

This chapter examines the technological architecture that facilitates the ‘mediations of commercial sex’ (Pettinger, 2015: 138) in order to contextualise and understand the complexities of digital sex markets. I use the ideas of science and technology scholars in this chapter to argue that technical devices influence and shape choices regarding working practices and consumption behaviour, particularly drawing attention to what Van Doorn and Velthius (2018) and I refer to as the ‘platformisation’ of sex markets.

As a contextual chapter, I begin by presenting a chronology of technological developments of the last half century alongside the expansion and diversification of sex markets. Digital sex markets are distinguishable by the ‘platformisation’ of sex markets; therefore, I explore how platforms have become integral to the rules of the market for customers and workers, by considering access, availability and payments. Furthermore, I analyse these technological developments within wider transformations of so called ‘web 2.0 and show the integration of sex work platforms with mainstream social media platforms. I then present an overview of different typologies of digital sexual services including a description of the service, business models, details of payments and prices. Through this typology I show that many digital sex workers create a portfolio of work, offering varied services as hybrid sex workers utilising the digital communication technologies available to them. The chapter concludes with a discussion on pricing arguing the fee ‘chosen’ by digital sex workers for services are co-created by technical and economic market devices as well as discursive devices based on value judgements of workers and customers.
4.2: The development of digitally-mediated sexual services

Developments in digital communication technologies, such as multi-channel digital television, smartphones, and fast Internet connections have increased access to digital sexual services and galvanised the development of new modalities of commercial sexual services. The access and availability of digitally-mediated sexual services is extensive both geographically and materially. Data from 2017 asserts over 85 per cent of the adult population in the UK owned a smartphone (Deloitte, 2017) and there is near universal Internet coverage to UK households (ONS, 2016). However, access and use of the Internet is not completely universal and some groups remain excluded from digital communication technologies. For instance, access is limited for those who live in remote rural areas and for those without the ability to afford being online, with older people less likely to have access (Dutton and Blank, 2015). Nevertheless, the majority of the population in the UK could potentially access - if they wish to - sexual services mediated by digital communication technologies.

As the modes of remotely transferring information between people grow, so do the ways in which people sexually communicate, both paid and unpaid, in a service interaction and in non-commercial sexual encounters, disturbing notions of public, private time and space (Nayar, 2017). Attwood compellingly states:

Today, ‘sex’ may be an out of body experience, very intimately performed across time and distance; it may be an intense act of communication between strangers; an encounter conjoining flesh and technology; an act of presentation and a representation which is consumed as quickly as it is produced; a way of articulating or disarticulating identity; a type of interaction never before possible in human history (2006: 3).

In contemporary British society, intimate and/or sexual interactions can include online and mobile encounters facilitated by, for example, chat rooms, online dating sites, ‘sexting’ (the exchange of sexual text and photo messages), emails, instant messaging, and more (Attwood, 2006; Baym, 2015; Gunter, 2013; Freitas, 2016). Digitally-mediated sexual encounters –
commercial and non-commercial – can be fleeting or long-term engagements between individuals and the connection may remain online or may lead to an offline interaction (Döring, 2009; Gunter, 2013). Due to the increase in access to the Internet and the diversification of modes of communication, for some people, in some contexts, sexual interactions mediated by technologies are embedded in everyday life (Attwood, 2006; Pettinger, 2015). In this context, digitally-mediated aspects of commercial sex are normalised for some people (Pettinger, 2015).

The interplay of technology and sex markets is not new, as technological developments have previously been adapted for commercial sex; for instance, from the second half of the twentieth century the everyday use of cars meant people could search for sex workers, and telephones were, and still are, used to make arrangements between sex workers and their customers, as well as to facilitate erotic telephone calls (Attwood, 2009; MacPhail et al., 2015). Illustrating the historical link between digital communication technologies and the expansion and diversification of UK sex markets, Table 1 provides a timeline of the key developments in communication technology over the last forty-five years. This seemingly entwined progression has led some scholars to suggest that the customers of the adult sex industry have provided a revenue stream that has financially assisted technological developments (Coopersmith, 2000; Lane, 2000; Maddison, 2009), although I would suggest that the relationship between technology and sex is more complex than that, as technological innovation is not the result only of market demands, but rather there are a number of ‘agents’ involved, including demand/customers, but also supply/workers, producers, investors and legal frameworks that co-create technological innovation.
Table 4.1: Developments in communication technology and modalities of sex work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Communication technology</th>
<th>Sexual service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>First email sent (Murray-West, 2016).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Bulletin Board Systems (BBS) used to transfer computer files between members.</td>
<td>Enabled people to anonymously exchange sexually explicit computer files, such as photographs and texts (Lane, 2000; Wysocki, 1998).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>First mobile phone (Murray-West, 2016).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Premium rate telephone numbers charge an inflated price of a telephone call to the caller’s phone bill (Phonepayplus, 2014).</td>
<td>First adult entertainment premium rate number established (Phonepayplus, 2014). The profit is divided between the telecommunications company and the adult entertainment business.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late 1980s</td>
<td>Multi-channel television through the development of ‘pay-for’ cable and satellite television channels.</td>
<td>Adult entertainment was legally distributed into British homes. ‘Mainstream’ channels would switch to adult entertainment after a certain hour, as well as dedicated adult entertainment channels. They were often interspersed with advertisements for adult phone lines with several channels solely dedicated to advertising adult phone lines (Jyrkinen, 2012).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Dial-up Internet is rolled out (Murray-West, 2016).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Development of premium rate text services.</td>
<td>Premium rate adult services diversify to include adult text services (Phonepayplus, 2014).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Broadband brought faster Internet speeds (Murray-West, 2016)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>3G launched for mobile phones</td>
<td>Adultwork.co.uk launched in the UK (Sanders et al., 2018b).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Facebook and YouTube are launched (Baym, 2011).</td>
<td>Adultwork transferred their domain to .com (Sanders et al., 2018b).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>The rise of digital platforms facilitating the exchange of services and labour. Airbnb and Task Rabbit are launched (Huws, 2017)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Broadband available in 93% of UK households (Ofcom, 2018).</td>
<td>Cam4, a leading webcam platform, introduced viewing webcam shows through a mobile virtual reality device (Cam4, 2018).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3: The ‘platformisation’ of sex work and its effects

The production and consumption of digitally-mediated services overwhelmingly takes place on digital platforms. Platforms are used for many aspects of daily life, from consumption, e.g. Amazon, Craigslist, Etzy (Gorwa, 2019) and cultural production e.g. Facebook, YouTube, Twitter (Gillespie, 2017), to labour relations, e.g. Amazon Mechanical Turk, Uber, Taskrabbit (Huws, 2017; Van Doorn, 2017). What is common to all platforms is the intermediary role in ‘connecting users and brokering their interactions’ (Gillespie, 2017: 1), as is the case for sex work platforms. My analysis focusses in particular on Adultwork, the leading multi-service sex work platform; although there are hundreds of webcam-only platforms and porn sites, Adultwork is currently the only platform that provides a wide range of sexual services and goods and is particularly popular in the UK (see Chapter Three for details).

As labour intermediaries, there are a number of processes that are adopted by sex work platforms that establish the rules of the market. Firstly, sex work platforms profit from a percentage charged to the worker for each transaction. The transaction fees vary according to the platform, ranging from 30 per cent to 50 per cent (See Appendix 1 for a summary). Adultwork takes a fee of 30 per cent for each online transaction. It should be noted that paying a fee to a labour broker is neither unique to digital labour nor sexual labour. Huws (2017) research demonstrates it is common practice to a pay a fee for a variety of services, particularly for those typically delivered by self-employed workers. In regard to sex markets, Sanders and Hardy’s (2012) study of erotic dancers found that they often pay a fee to work, which can result in them earning no money on a shift, or even being in debt to the clubs because the fees are higher than the income generated from paying customers. Although not unique to sex markets, a fee of 30 per cent is high in comparison to other digital labour markets. For instance, Aloisi’s (2016) study of platform-based labour suggests fees range
from 10 per cent to 20 per cent. This goes some way to explain the sometimes frustrating but overall acceptance of the relatively high fees digital sex workers pay.

Secondly, the process of charging fees means there is a digital financial record of sex market transactions, thus creating a traceable, and therefore taxable record. This is an inevitable result of the digital economy, and has bought this aspect of sex markets into the formal economy. Paid labour that traditionally operated in the cash-in-hand economy has increasingly entered the formal economy due to the growth of platform-managed labour because the payments are electronic (Huws, 2016). As Çalışkan and Callon note, ‘organising and framing the encounter [between workers and customers] is the product of the activity of mediators’ (2010: 15). Sex work platforms as a mediator, or intermediary, have economically formalised some forms of sexual market exchange, thus changing the economic organisation of sex markets that have in the past predominately been part of the ‘cash-in-hand’ informal economy (Sanders, 2008b; Sanders and Hardy, 2014; Pitcher, 2015; Brooks-Gordon et al., 2015; Lister, 2015). It is only digitally-mediated services that are subject to the 30 per cent transaction fees and therefore have a traceable record. Payments for direct sex work are not administered by the platforms and remains cash-in-hand. This ensures sex work platforms stay within the rules of formal laws, thus maintaining their place in sex markets.

The platform carefully avoids directly profiting from ‘prostitution’,⁴ which is illegal throughout the different jurisdictions in the UK. For example, in England and Wales, it is not illegal to sell sex, but it is illegal for anyone to keep a brothel, or cause, incite, or control prostitution for financial gain (Phoenix, 2017); therefore, the economic transaction for direct sex work takes place offline when the ‘members’ meet. This ensures Adultwork stays within the law by not profiting directly from ‘prostitution’ and transfers responsibility onto

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⁴ I use the term prostitution here as it reflects the language used in formal law and the rules stipulated by platforms regarding direct sex work.
members’ to work within the legal framework of the country they are in. Chapter Five explores how the regulatory framework contributes to the production of digital sex markets in detail.

Thirdly, platforms can shut down sex worker profiles without notice, thereby terminating workers’ ability to work and withholding their income. Digital sex workers are paid electronically by the platforms after the customers pay the platform for the service delivered by the worker. However, in the case of Adultwork, digital sex workers cannot withdraw their income until they have met a monetary threshold of £100. Webcam only platforms, such as Cam4 and Chaturbate, allow workers to request payment once they have made $50. Like other labour platforms, redress can be problematic because of the distant and faceless nature of platforms (De Stefano, 2016; Meil and Kirov, 2017). Digital sex workers in this study reported poor communication and even no response from Adultwork. Aloisi (2015) describes this as an endless probation period.

Lastly, it has become commonplace for digital sex workers to upload free content. Platforms are able to profit from the unpaid labour of workers and to some extent customers. Nearly, all the content of sex work platforms is generated by digital sex workers. As Ritzer and Jurgenson note, the initial infrastructure for platforms may be quite high, but the cost of hosting profiles and mediating between users ‘is very low and ever-decreasing’ (2010: 28). Much of the content of sex work platforms is free to view, and is not directly paid for by customers. Customers can browse profiles, view photographs and on many webcam sites watch performances without paying the platform or the digital sex worker. This varies depending on the business model adopted by the sex work platform. Some sex work platforms, such as Chaturbate and Cam4 always have live webcam shows streaming that a customer can view without payment or without registering to the website. On these platforms, digital sex workers only receive an income when customers ‘tip’ them. The majority of
digital sex workers in this study did not use these sex work platforms, but preferred Adultwork. On Adultwork, customers pay the platform via its credit system to view photographs, download films, and for sexual exchanges between the worker and the customer mediated by the platform. Rates for digitally-mediated sexual services are set per minute (see Table 4.2 for details). It is commonplace for digital sex workers to produce content for sex work platforms as a way to market their services, as a route to paid work. This was viewed by some digital sex workers in this study as a social activity rather than unpaid labour that profited sex work platforms.

Contemporary use of the Internet, sometimes referred to as ‘web 2.0’, has normalised users creating online content without payment from online platforms. Digital communication technologies make it easier to produce, upload and edit all manner of text, photographs and film. Social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, encourage users of the Internet to become ‘prosumers’ (Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010: 18) – uploading content in the form of blogs, films, microblogs, and photographs. For example, YouTube profits from users uploading and sharing videos; Twitter generates value from users writing microblogs; and Instagram profits from users taking and uploading photographs (Fuchs, 2015). Thus, ‘web 2.0’ is considered more participatory than earlier forms of the Internet, with networked platforms ‘putting consumers to work’ in the production of online content, thus becoming ‘prosumers’ (Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010: 18). In the context of digital sex markets, workers produce online content, regularly uploading content for free, without receiving a direct income from their labour.

For some people, social media platforms have normalised uploading and sharing images, videos and personal information online with relative strangers. The functionality and features of sex work platforms are comparable to social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter. Drawing on Baym’s (2011) analysis of Facebook, it is clear that popular sex
work platforms have similarities with well-known social media sites, sharing many technological features, in particular, the creation of individual profiles that contain a ‘friend’ or ‘members’ list as way to network with other people, using the networked infrastructure of sex work platforms to communicate with customers and other workers. Furthermore, sex worker profiles, although generally sexually explicit, include text and visual content that describes their aesthetic qualities, as well as personal attributes. Like other forms of self-presentation on social media sites, profiles on sex work platforms, like Adultwork, constrain the options for the user. Profiles are not so much spaces of creativity, rather sex workers are encouraged to provide the same information as others do, through the use of drop-down menus. This makes the information comparable and therefore quantifiable, something essential for market transactions (Çalişkan and Callon, 2010; Callon, 2007).

From a consumption perspective, there is an abundance of choice in regard to sex work platforms and profiles. The array of platforms can potentially cater to the diverse sexual and aesthetic preferences of the customers. (See Appendix 1 for a summary of sex work platforms). In an online context, customers’ tastes are not limited by geographical availability. Within each sex work platform, the extensive choice to a customer is made possible by the low cost to platforms of listing sex worker profiles. From an extensive menu taken from information given on sex worker profiles, a customer can choose, for example, the age, body size, gender, nationality, sexual identity and ethnicity/race of a desired sex worker. The customer is able to see immediately the availability, price, and services offered. Furthermore, the customer can, in most cases, see reviews from other customers on the quality of the service provided. The customer, thanks to the technology, is able to express and act on their tastes and preferences and takes on the role of ‘chooser’.

It should be noted that in mainstream sex work and webcam platforms digital sex workers generally present themselves in a standardised manner based on mass-produced
heterosexual pornography. There is choice but mainly within a heteronormative framework. This will be discussed further in Chapter Seven.

Digital sex workers in this study discussed marketing themselves on several platforms so as to generate more work, and in doing so increase the choice on each of the platforms. Scholars of digital technology have shown that the more choice a platform is able to provide a customer, the more successful a platform will be (Reuver et al., 2018). Once a platform has significant market presence, the ‘network effects kick in’ (Huws, 2017: 41). The larger the platform is seen to be, the more customers it attracts. The needs of the online customer are met through choice, reliability, and availability.

The convenience and availability of digitally-mediated sexual services mean it is harder for customers not to act upon their desire to purchase sexual services. Unlike sex markets that take place offline, such as stripping and direct sex work, digitally-mediated services are always and easily available. The availability of sexual services means customers can engage in browsing, not actually spending money, yet potentially still experiencing some level of sexual stimulation/satisfaction. The influence of these technical devices on customers’ behaviour will be explored in more detail in Chapter Six.

4.4: Digital modalities of sex work

In what follows, I provide a snapshot of digital sexual services that captures a moment in the ‘online commercial sex revolution’ (Sanders et al., 2018b: 163), which is hard to pin down, as digital markets are dynamic. Platforms are flexible and are designed with the ability to build new products within the same framework (Bridgewater, 2015, Reuver et al., 2018; Gorwa, 2019), therefore, their functionality changes frequently, adding new features. Digital sex workers respond creatively to this, often incorporating new software into their repertoire. Digital sexual services, as listed in the following table are, in part, linked to the features and
functionality of the platforms that currently facilitate sexual services in the UK. Some mediated-services remain available offline, such as premium rate telephone calls, but this study has found that platforms are increasingly most commonly used.

Sex work platforms ‘network’ or connect users through various forms of digital communication, such as email, instant messenger, discussion groups, blogs and, as noted, ‘friends’ lists on profiles. Integrated into Adultwork are other platforms such as Twitter and Skype. As a result, digital sex workers draw on various communication technologies to make an income, thus, the boundaries between sex work modalities are not fixed, but integrate and amalgamate to form a portfolio of services offered, depending on the technical devices available and the ‘choices’ digital sex workers make. For example, instant messaging may be used to arrange a private webcam session or a regular customer may communicate with a sex worker using a range of other communication modalities such as text, email and telephone. Amongst this study’s participants who offered direct ‘meet up’ services, it was usual to use digital communication technology (email, telephone, text, IM) to arrange the details of meeting up. The majority of digital sex workers in this study offered a portfolio of services as hybrid sex workers. These concepts are unpacked more fully in Chapter Seven. The following table describes the service, business models adopted and details of payment and pricing structures.
### Table 4.2: Digitally-mediated sex work: business models, payment and pricing

| **Webcamming** | A performance that is transmitted online via a small camera that is either built in or attached to a laptop. The explicit nature of the performance depends on the worker – ranging from partial nudity to full sexual intercourse with another worker or sex toy. Webcam performances are available in different online spaces, including online platforms that offer a variety of sexual services, such as Adultwork and webcam-only platforms such as Myfreecams and Chaturbate. |
| **Business model** | A multi-service platform, like Adultwork, charges per minute and distinguishes between ‘group’ and ‘private’ shows. Group shows are for more than one customer and private shows are for one person only. As a way to attract customers, the webcam provider has the option of offering ‘freeview’: customers can watch the digital sex worker and talk and/or type in an ‘instant chat box’, but generally the digital sex worker will not start the ‘show’ until there are paying customers. Webcam only platforms mainly use a system based on tips. The webcam provider begins the show and encourages customers to tip for the show to progress. Many providers use a ‘menu’ to show the customers how many tips they expect before they perform an act, such as removing their clothes (as shown at the bottom of figure 4.1). In this business model, there can be many hundreds of customers watching the show for free (as shown to the right of figure 4.1). The customers can choose to tip the performer to encourage the show to progress. |
| **Payment** | In the first business model, the customer pays per minute via the platform. In the second business model, the customer buys tokens, by which the customer tips. The cost of the token is set by the platforms, but vary in price according to the ‘membership’ the customer has, or the amount of tokens purchased. |
| **Pricing** | On multiservice platforms like Adultwork the worker sets the prices, which range from 99p to £3.50 per minute. On webcam-only platforms, digital sex workers decide how many tips they require to progress the show. Chaturbate pay 5 cents and Myfreecams pay 1 cent per token to digital sex workers. |

| **Telephone Calls** | Fantasy-based erotic/sexual telephone calls connect the worker and the customer either with offline services using mobile technology or online using sex work platforms. |
| **Business model** | Offline services use premium rate phone numbers where the cost is added to the customers’ telephone bill, as well as prepaid services from a mobile on land line. As a form of sex work available before the Internet these services still exist but are decreasing in popularity. Online platforms, such as Adultwork, offer telephone services facilitated by the platform known as ‘direct chat’, as well as prepaid telephone calls that operate through a telephone connection or Skype. |
| **Payment** | In both cases the customer pays per minute for the service. |
| **Pricing** | Offline prices are set by the company and range from 72p - £10.80 per minute. On platforms, prices are set by the worker and range from 83p - £4.79 per minute. |
**Text Messages**

Texts with sexual content, or ‘sexts’, as they are commonly known, can be used to exchange films, photographs and text. Like telephone calls, text messages are between the customer and the digital sex worker but connected by the Internet or mobile technology.

**Business model**

Text services are available from businesses that only provide this service and operate using a premium rate text number and from online platforms like Adultwork where text messages are transmitted via the platform to the paying customer’s mobile phone.

**Payment**

In the first business model, the customer pays per text, often with a premium put on the first text message usually through their telephone bill. In the second business model, the customer replies to the text from their mobile phone and pays for the service via the platform’s payment system.

**Pricing**

The digital sex worker is paid per text and neither party is aware of their personal phone numbers. Prices are set by platforms or companies and range from 50p - £1.50 per text.

**----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------**

**Instant Messages**

Instant messages (IMs) are similar to text messages for digital sex workers and customer in that the communication is in written form, but only available online.

**Business model**

The interaction takes place via the online platform using a laptop or computer. Digital sex workers may offer IM as a standalone service, however more commonly, IM forms part of a portfolio of sexual services and are used as a way to establish rapport, discuss a further potential transaction and uses the communication as an opportunity to decide whether the customer is ‘safe’ and authentic.

Snapchat and WhatsApp are two popular messaging services that are mediated by the Internet on smartphones. Digital sex workers reported using these messaging services to distribute videos and photographs to customers. This avoided paying a transaction fee to a digital platform. In addition, two digital sex workers in this study took a one-off payment from customers to have ongoing access to their Snapchat accounts. This means they could share images with a number of customers simultaneously.

**Payment**

On Adultwork, customers are billed per minute rather than per text. Instant messaging is free on webcam-only platforms and is commonly part of the service. Access to messaging services was a one-off payment privately arranged.

**Pricing**

Prices are set by workers on Adultwork and range from 60p - £3.99. Prices to access messaging services on Whatsapp and Snapchat are set individually as a one-off fee.

**----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------**

**Email**

Emails can be sent via integrated platforms or to personal email accounts advertised on individual websites.

**Payment**

Customers do not currently pay to send and receive emails with digital sex workers, however, data from this study and other academic research suggest sending and receiving emails can be sexually arousing (Robinson and Moskowitz, 2013).

**Pricing**

These services are free.
Figure 4.1: Interactive page on a webcam-only platform

- a) Live streaming of webcam show
- b) Instant 'chat box'
- c) List of customers
- d) Customer choices
- e) Menu of services and tips required

*Details that would identify the sex worker or customers have been hidden.
4.4: Pricing in a competitive market

Digital sex markets are highly competitive as supply far outstrips demand. This is evident in the numerous platforms and the thousands of sex worker profiles available, as well as in the narratives of workers and customers in the study. In this context, the prices charged for services becomes a way to get an edge on competition, yet within the constraints of maintaining an economically viable income. Sex workers, therefore, use their agency to set a price for the services they offer by evaluating what other digital sex workers charge, ‘for the price of any particular transaction is always calculated on the basis of other prices’ (Çalişkan and Callon, 2010: 17).

In competitive markets, like digital sex markets, there is typically a ‘race to the bottom’ in regard to payments to workers and prices charged to customers. With no guarantee of income offered by the platforms, the cost of services are left to the market to decide. The more workers there are, the more competitive the pricing becomes. There appears to be a steady supply of women and men willing to try digital sex work. The possibility of earning ‘easy money’ is alluring and promoted in mainstream media. For instance, BBC 3’s (2014) documentary The Truth about Webcam Girls and Channel 4’s (2019) Virtual Sex documentary that claimed women can earn up to $150,000 a year webcamming in the US. This ‘race to the bottom’ has been seen in other sex markets, such as stripping (Sanders and Hardy, 2012) and on digital labour platforms, such as Deliveroo (Poon, 2018). Hardy and Sanders found strip club managers increased the number of women working on a shift, from an ‘extensive, infinite pool’ of workers (2012: 526). This made it hard for the strippers in their study to resist the devaluation of their labour and ultimately a drop in income. In a neoliberal political economy employment relations are individualised which has seen a decline in collective action. However, in the case of Deliveroo, workers resisted this trend and collectively organised to
strike against the platform, demanding fair payment for the service they delivered and guaranteeing an income that was at least the minimum wage (Poon, 2018).

In regard to pricing on Adultwork, the production of value is ‘framed and formatted by a series of devices’ (Çalışkan and Callon, 2010: 17), therefore, the value put on the service is neither based solely on the will or desire of the worker, nor on the economics of supply and demand, but on the technical apparatus. For instance, Adultwork determines that emails are of no cost to the customer, and digital sex workers freely send emails (generally in the hope of generating income by enticing a customer), whereas Adultwork has set a flat rate for text messages and charges customers 50p for each text they receive (of which digital sex workers receive 70 per cent of or 35p). These fees are not in the control of the individual sex worker, rather, if they wish to use Adultwork they must consent to the fee structure.

Even when pricing is set by individual digital sex workers, as is the case on Adultwork, with webcamming, phone and instant messaging, the value is produced by economics and moral judgements, because:

Calculation can either meet the requirements of algorithmic formulation or be closer to intuition or judgement. Such a definition establishes a continuum between qualitative judgement and quantitative (or numeric) calculation (Callon and Muniesa, 2005: 1232).

This argument is also put forward by Pettinger (2013) and Van Doorn and Velthius (2018) in relation to pricing in contemporary sex markets. The value of certain actions and practices is based, in part, on moral judgements of worth. For instance, those in the study who offered webcam shows that involved another person or a sex toy would charge more than if they did a show that involved them taking their clothes off. Yet, the respondent who was a ‘glamour model’ was able to charge more as the value to the customer is higher than another webcam show that entails more intimate acts. Certain bodies were more valued on the market than others. This is explored in more detail in Chapter Six through the narratives of digital sex workers. The argument here is that pricing is not solely based on the agency of sex workers, but
rather a network of calculative agencies, including the technical organisation of markets (Callon, 2007). When a persons’ income is based only on market devices – technical, discursive and economic devices - there is a risk that incomes decline while profits to the managers or platform owners are maintained.

4.5: Conclusion

In this chapter I have highlighted the developments in communication technologies, leading to the ‘platformisation’ of sex markets. Sex work platforms reflect the deregulation of labour markets and the individualisation of employment relations more generally. Digital sex work is also part of the social trend in presenting oneself online through profiles that feature photographs and information (Illouz, 2007; Baym, 2011). Furthermore, for some people, in the digital age, the exchange of sexual images and texts is normalised (Attwood, 2006; Pettinger, 2015). I have argued that sex work platforms organise digital sex markets in specific ways and the ‘platformisation’ of sex markets shape the rules of the market. Customers and workers, therefore, know how to engage in the market and what is expected of them (Callon, 2007; Çalişkan and Callon, 2010). This can be seen in a number of ways.

I have shown, through the case study of Adultwork, that the technical devices of sex work platforms are integrated with other social media platforms. For instance, Adultwork mirrors the functionality and features of ‘mainstream’ social media sites. These create a familiarity for sex workers, as the practice of creating online profiles and networking across platforms is common practice for many people. Furthermore, browsing online profiles is also common practice, for some, as is exchanging images and texts with relative strangers, therefore normalising some of the practices associated with digital sex markets. The typology of digitally-mediated sexual services shows the diversity, availability and ease of access to digital sex markets.
I have further shown that adding online content for free is an essential part of the labour of digital sex workers and is done to generate paid work, but is also understood in a context where generating online content for free is an everyday phenomenon. Without a detailed profile, sex workers would not generate interest in their services. The online content added by sex workers co-creates the platform, as without the content the platform would not be of value to the customers. The more sex worker profiles available, the more choice the customer is given, further adding value to sex work platforms while simultaneously pushing prices, and therefore income, down for digital sex workers. In addition, I have argued that the value placed on services is left to market devices, as there is no guarantee of an income. Prices charged are not based solely on the agency of the worker, but rather are co-created by a number of market devices, including technical devices. For instance, the data reveals that browsing and emailing is part of digital sex markets, as discussed in more detail in Chapter Six. Extensive choice and constant availability is required for a platform to be successful but workers do not receive any payment for creating the online content that makes this possible; thus maximising the surplus value for the platform from the labour of digital sex workers.

In the following chapter, I develop the discussion put forward here regarding the self-governance of platforms and how these coincide with formal laws regarding sex work and pornography.
Chapter Five: An uncertain regulatory framework: Criminalisation, differentiation and legitimation

5.1: Introduction

Across the UK’s jurisdictions, there is no specific regulation regarding the consumption and/or production of digitally-mediated sexual services. In formal law, these services are neither framed as prostitution, nor pornography, which are currently constructed and legislated as two distinct phenomena (Carline, 2011), even though the two are entwined in the production and consumption of sex markets, and increasingly so in the digital age. Indeed, formal law does not refer to digitally-mediated services at all, showing a ‘relative inattentiveness’ (Scoular, 2010: 13) to digital development in sex markets; however, it would be incorrect to state that the production and consumption of digitally-mediated sexual services are not influenced by the law, just because they do not fall directly and explicitly under certain legislations. To explore this further, I adopt a lens of governmentality, drawing on Scoular’s (2010) Foucauldian analysis of sex work legislation in Europe. By doing this, I do not want to overstate the power of the law on digital sex markets, but rather recognise the law – as part of wider regulatory mechanisms concerned with lives, rather than acts – that establishes norms, shapes content and working practices, and legitimises/delegitimises certain sex markets (Scoular, 2010; Scott, 2011; Carline, 2011). Expanding further the discussions presented in the Literature Review on sex work platforms’ governance and their responsiveness to formal laws pertaining to sex work and pornography, here I analyse the ways in which the regulatory framework, as part of the construction of digital sex markets, provides an informal legal online space necessary for customers and workers to operate in enterprising free markets. I argue that the ‘logic of differentiation’ (Scott, 2011: 65) is seen in the regulatory framework of digitally-mediated sex work; formal laws continue to focus on street sex work and migrant sex workers, thus evoking a
‘politics of difference’ (Scott, 2011:65), in the governance by platforms. Platforms distance digital sex work from other forms of commercial sex (‘prostitution’ and migrant sex workers), so as to remain legitimate and ‘legal’. Furthermore, this logic of differentiation is adopted by some digital sex workers who distance their sexual labour from other forms that they understand as ‘risky’, thus presenting themselves as ‘sexual entrepreneurs’ legitimated by the state for their economic value.

The chapter is organised in the following way: In the first section I present the current regulations pertinent to digital sex markets, highlighting the gentle shift from the traditional liberal distinction between private consumption and public forms of sex that has been the foundation of the British regulatory framework, to an increasingly neoliberal approach to sex work regulation, which, while opening-up markets, including digital sex markets, responsibilises citizens through self-governance. After explaining the formal legal context and the impact it has on working practices, I analyse the role of the law in maintaining the structural stigma associated with commercial sex, illustrating not only how this is maintained but also highlighting the process of differentiation that distinguishes between less economically viable, more visible forms of sex work and profitable, unnoticed forms of sex work, such as digitally-mediated sex work.

5:2: Current framework: Public nuisance/private consumption

The key legislation that shape digital sex markets is presented in Table 5.1. In 1957, the Wolfenden Report reviewed the laws regarding homosexuality and prostitution. It was a significant moment in how sexual behaviour was framed under British jurisdiction. The report adopted the liberal dichotomy of private and public, and protected the private realm as a site of consumption and the public realm as a space of civility (Scott, 2011), recommending that sexual matters between consenting adults, taking place in private, were not subject to criminal
law; therefore, in England, Wales and Scotland, the buying and selling of sex between two consenting adults, in private, is legal. However, visible forms (and spaces) of sex work are considered problematic if it causes a public nuisance and disturbs the ‘decency’ of others (Carline, 2011; Phoenix, 2017; Feis-Bryce, 2018). This distinction continues to shape sex work policies in Britain in a number of ways (Scott, 2011), as will be explored in the following discussion.
**Table 5.1: Key legislation in England, Wales and Scotland relevant to digitally-mediated sexual services**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Regulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>The Obscene Publications Act s2(1) – makes it an offence to ‘distribute, circulate, sell, offer, give, show, play, or project’ material that is deemed to ‘deprave or corrupt persons to read, see or hear it’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>The Sexual Offences Act (Scotland) s.67 – makes it an offence for men to solicit for immoral purposes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Sexual Offences Act s.44 – makes it an offence to solicit sexual services in a public place and to kerb-crawl with persistence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Criminal Justice and Public Order Act s.168 amended the Obscene Publications Act to include ‘transmission of data’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Criminal Justice and Police Act s.46 – makes it an offence to advertise ‘prostitution’ in public phone boxes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Sexual Offences Act s.52 and s.53 – makes it illegal to ‘cause or incite prostitution for gain’. *Communications Act s.120 – 123 legislates code of conduct for premium rate phone and text services to be overseen by OFCOM.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>The Prostitution (Public Places) (Scotland) Act – makes it an offence to kerb-crawl.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Criminal Justice and Immigration Act s.63 and The Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act s.42 – makes it an offence to be in possession of ‘extreme pornography’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Policing and Crime Act s.14 – makes it a strict liability offence to buy services of a ‘prostitute’ who is ‘subjected to force, threats (whether or not relating to violence) or any other form of coercion or deception’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Criminal Justice and Courts Act s.33 – makes it offence to disclose private sexual photographs and films without consent and with the intent to cause distress. Commonly referred to as the ‘Revenge Porn Act’. *Serious Crime Act 2015 s.68 asserts someone under 18 is a child and cannot be criminalised for their involvement in prostitution or pornography.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Modern Slavery Act s.54 makes it a legal requirement for organisations to publish a slavery and human trafficking statement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Digital Economy Act s.14-30 implemented an age verification process on all adult content websites and platforms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Data Protection Act – individuals have the ‘right to erasure’, requesting all online data regarding themselves to be removed from platforms.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The legal framing of prostitution has historically been gendered. S.44 (1) of the Sexual Offences Act 1985 states, ‘a man commits an offence if he solicits a woman for the purpose of prostitution’. It was not until 2003 when s.54 of the Sexual Offences Act introduced a gender-neutral language in regard to commercial sex, although male sex work remains largely ignored in policy (Ashford, 2009). Historically, the state’s concern relating to male sexuality has focussed on homosexuality rather than the exchange of sex for money, whereas the concern of controlling women’s sexuality has been to maintain the distinction between public and private, thus separating sex from the market. This gendered construction is rooted in religious morals which consider that women should only ‘give’ sex away in marriage and for procreation, not in a market exchange for money, whereas men’s sexuality is problematic when unproductive and wasteful, that is, not leading to children (Rubin, 1984; Nussbaum, 1998; Zelizer, 2005).

Maintaining sex as a private matter is evident in the Street Offences Act 1959 (as amended by the Sexual Offences Act 2003, the Policing and Crime Act 2009, and the Serious Crime Act 2015), which criminalises sex workers from ‘loitering’ in a public place or street with the intention of selling sex. Also, customers cannot legally ‘solicit’ sex from a sex worker in a public place or street. In addition, after political pressure from residents and MPs, the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 criminalises those who advertise ‘prostitution’ in public telephone boxes (Hubbard, 2004). In effect, these laws take a zero-tolerance approach to relatively public forms of sex work (Hubbard, 2006).

Reinforcing the liberal dichotomy of public/private, sex is a public matter when it takes place in the market economy; therefore, it is illegal to profit from prostitution. Under the Sexual Offences Act, 2003 s.52 and 53, it is criminal to ‘cause or incite’ another person to become a prostitute and control prostitution for financial gain. As noted in the previous chapter, this
means platforms avoid profiting from ‘prostitution’ by ensuring financial transactions for direct sex work take place privately, offline.

Following the same liberal position, it is also illegal to keep a brothel. There are a number of ‘brothel-keeping laws’ – as they have come to be known – dating back to the Victorian era (see Brooks-Gordon (2006) for a historical account of the legal framework and the brothel-keeping laws). These laws restrict how and where sex workers can work; in order to keep within the law, sex workers cannot work in the same property with another sex worker. Under the Sexual Offences Act 2003, a ‘brothel’ is defined as a venue where one or more ‘prostitutes’ work (on rotation or at the same time) (Crown Prosecution Service, 2018). Sex work academics and activists have long campaigned to remove ‘brothel-keeping laws’ as allowing sex workers to work together or in a collective would provide safer working conditions than working alone (Laite, 2006; Pitcher, 2015 Sanders et al., 2016). The increase in sex workers advertising online and working independently makes the repeal of brothel-keeping laws ever more necessary. Furthermore, brothel-keeping laws make it illegal to profit from a brothel. This means sex workers cannot legally employ personnel – such as a receptionist or security – who could contribute to their well-being and safety at work (Feis-Bryce, 2018).

The law, in part, has normalised sex workers working alone in private premises, although this is also reflective of trends in labour markets more generally (Taylor and Luckman, 2018). Amongst participants in this study it was the norm to regularly work alone, either in their own home or in premises rented specifically for the purpose of sex work. There were exceptions to this, for example, webcammers would sometimes work together to collaborate on a show, or work from a home that they shared with others (flatmates, parents or partners). As a result, digital sex workers are not a ‘public nuisance’ but rather are self-governing and responsible for their own welfare, largely outside of state intervention and protection.
Working in the shadow of criminalisation means digital sex workers were reluctant to report unwanted attention, online abuse and/or illegal requests from customers regarding minors to the police and were more likely to draw on platforms as safeguarders. This reflects findings from Campbell et al.’s (2018) research, which suggests sex workers in the online market under-report crimes committed against them, in part, because of the illegality of brothels and confusion over the legal framework. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven through the narratives of digital sex workers.

5.3: The ‘creeping’ criminalisation of sexual consumption

From the customers’ perspective, until recently, private sexual consumption has been shielded from criminal law. It is not illegal to pay for sex between two consenting adults, (with the exception of street sex work) nor to view sexually explicit materials; however, there is a ‘creeping’ criminalisation of sexual consumption in Britain. In Northern Ireland, buying sex was criminalised under the Human Trafficking and Exploitation Act 2015, and in 2017 buying sex was also banned in the Republic of Ireland. There is a similar political will in England, Wales and Scotland to ‘tackle demand’ (Home Office, 2008). The Policing and Crime Act 2009 made it a strict liability offence to buy sexual services from someone who is subject to force or coercion. The inclusion of ‘strict liability’ means the defendant is assumed guilty even if they did not know the individual was forced. Kingston and Thomas’ (2014) study shows that the law has only led to eight arrests between 2009 and 2012, suggesting the law is used as part of wider processes of governmentality (Foucault, 2002), through techniques of responsibilisation (as further discussed below).

In recent decades, there has been a notable shift from liberal ideas of separating the market from sex to neoliberal ideals that subscribe to free markets and entrepreneurialism whilst responsibilising citizens for their own moral behaviour in regard to viewing sexually
explicit materials. The Obscene Publication Act 1958 followed the liberal dichotomy of private/public and did not criminalise the consumer of ‘obscene’ materials, but rather protected the sovereignty of the consumer. According to s.66 of the Act, if content is found to be obscene, it is criminalised as it enters the market. It is an offence to ‘distribute, circulate, sell, offer, give, show, play, or project’ material that is deemed by the state to ‘deprave or corrupt persons to read, see or hear it’. The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 s.168 included the transmission of data with the intention of updating the Obscene Publication Act for the digital era (Hedley, 2006). Despite this update, the Obscene Publications Act is rarely used to bring prosecutions. In 2005, there were 35 prosecutions compared to 309 in 1994 (Home Office, 2005) and politicians argued that the Act was inadequate to regulate sexual content in a digital era. Attwood and Smith (2010) quote the Home Office Minister, Vernon Coaker in 2006, referring to ‘deeply abhorrent’ materials online:

Such material has no place in our society, but the advent of the internet has meant that this material is more easily available and means existing controls are being bypassed – we must move to tackle this (2010: 173).

The digital era, however, blurs the legal and geographical boundaries of production and distribution. When the Obscene Publications Act was approved, the British government had greater control over the few media channels in existence, as there were only a relatively small number of national newspapers, and three television channels. In the digital era, due to the globalised nature of media production, nation states have much less control over the production of content, as much of it is produced and hosted outside of the nation states’ jurisdiction (Gillespie, 2017). In this context, criminalising the customer becomes the only viable option of controlling sexual consumption.

S.63 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 challenges the previously protected realm of private sexual consumption. The Act is a departure from the existing pornography legislation as it responsibilises the purchaser of ‘obscene content’ or pornography,
challenging the individual to acknowledge and question their morality. It criminalises the possession of ‘extreme pornography’ defined as a still or moving image or that is: ‘grossly offensive, disgusting or otherwise of an obscene character’ or depicts an act that: a) threatens a person’s life, b) results, or likely to result, in serious injury to a person’s anus, breasts or genitals, c) involves sexual interference with a corpse, d) is a person performing an act of intercourse or oral sex with an animal (whether dead or alive). The sexual actions do not have to be ‘real’, but rather judged as ‘real’ by a reasonable person. What is considered ‘offensive’ or ‘disgusting’ is highly subjective and, as Wilkinson (2011) argues, the definitions appear to be deliberately vague and open to interpretation. As with the Obscene Publications Act, judgement of what is considered offensive is mainly left to be decided in case law.

The ‘creeping’ criminalisation of private consumption that increasingly responsibilises the individual, ‘to acknowledge and question their own morality’ (Hubbard, 2000: 199), reflects a change in attitude to sexual consumption. It is reflective of contemporary governmentality that draws on both legal and state apparatus, such as formal law and criminal sanctions, but also self-governance to control lives. As Carline (2011) argues, the responsibility to maintain morality is placed with the consumer who, if caught violating the law, could face up to three years in prison and a fine. It is a paradox of neoliberalism that, on the one hand, there is an expansion of some forms of sex markets through the deregulation of labour markets with limited state involvement in labour processes, whilst on the other hand, markets are subject to new regulations of norms in regard to sexual morality and appropriate expressions of sexuality (Carline, 2011: 312), as seen in the governance of platforms that adhere to formal laws so as to maintain their place in the market and remain ‘feasible’.
5.4: Informal regulatory spaces: Platform governance

Digitally-mediated sex work could be included in the legal definition of either ‘prostitution’ and/or pornography, as digital sex markets include the consumption of sexual services and production of ‘obscene’ material, including still and moving images through the transmission of data. However, as discussed in Chapter Three, there is neither formal nor specific laws pertaining to digital sex markets, nor any mention of digital sex markets in recent policy reviews (Sanders et al. 2018b). The lack of specific formal law regarding digital sex markets creates an informal regulatory space that is commonly filled by the self-governance of platforms, taking on the role of policing the content and behaviour of their users (Gillepsie, 2017; Gorwa, 2019). Adding to the literature, I argue that platform governance also acts as informal ‘police’, not only to penalise digital sex workers, but also in a safeguarding role that protects sex workers from unwanted behaviour from customers. This is explored in more detail through the narratives of digital sex workers in Chapter Seven.

Sex work platforms, like *Adultwork*, acknowledge the existing regulatory framework in their ‘code of conduct’ and ‘user agreement’, seeking to ensure they stay within the limits of the formal law. For instance, Adultwork, informs their ‘members’ to follow the restrictions as outlined in s.63 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008, also known as the ‘dangerous pictures’ act; however, how this can be managed and controlled by the state is questionable, as policing live video streaming, a telephone conversation, or instant messaging would involve intensive and costly police surveillance. Furthermore, these forms of communication are dynamic, instant, short-lived and between two consenting adults. It is, therefore, more common that platforms self-govern content, relying on automated searches and reports from workers and customers. The impact of this on both workers’ and customers’ agency is explored in detail in the following chapters through the analysis of the narratives of digital sex workers and customers.
Platform self-governance does not only reflect state law, platforms also have considerable control over access to the market (see Chapter Four) and the agency of digital sex workers. For example, Myfreecams, one of the most popular webcam platforms, states in its code of conduct that men cannot feature in the webcam shows. Similarly, Cam4 insist that workers can only work from their site at any one time. In addition, both Adultwork and Cam4 explicitly states they can use any content uploaded to their site without specific permission from the user, therefore, digital sex workers sacrifice ownership of their images and videos to digital platforms. This suggests that the lack of formal regulations produces an informal regulatory space that gives platforms considerable influence over sex markets.

Through processes of differentiation, telephone and text companies; and sex work platforms facilitating digitally-mediated sexual services state clearly that they do not support prostitution. This ensures sex work platforms remain within the legal framework and continue to be viable. The wording of Adultwork’s ‘Code of Conduct’ recently renamed ‘Statements and Opinions’ as part of an overhaul of their regulations (Adultwork, 2019), ensures that any legal risk is transferred to the ‘members’, stating: ‘The burden on the membership to ‘keep it legal’ are clearly defined in the Site’s Terms of Use’ (Adultwork, 2019), where it states members ‘are not permitted to use the AW site(s) to send or receive payment for any kind of physical meeting’, thus ensuring no legal responsibility to ‘cause or incite prostitution for gain’, which is criminalised under the Sexual Offences Act 2003. Sex work platforms that have a more global customer base state similar rules, such as Cam4 and Chaturbate. Furthermore, the Office of Communication (OFCOM), a government regulatory body for the communications industries, oversees premium rate telephone lines, including telephone sex lines, and seeks to differentiate telephone sex work from prostitution. Telephone sex lines are regulated in the same manner as other premium rate numbers – for example, the caller must be over eighteen and there is a time/cost limit for each call, but OFCOM attempts to legitimise it by distancing it from other
forms of sex work. The code of practice outlined by the government body specifies the services must not promote or facilitate ‘prostitution’, thereby distinguishing telephone sex work from other forms of (criminal) sex work (see Phonepayplus, 2015).

Despite the differentiation by corporations between mediated forms of sex work and ‘prostitution’, commercial sex – in all forms – is still widely labelled as ‘deviant’ and/or ‘bad’. Weitzer (2010) argues that stigma ‘colours all sex work’ (2010: 30), even forms of sex work that are not criminalised, such as stripping, and digitally-mediated sex work. The law is fundamental, alongside other state actors (health services, police) and media portrayals, in the structural stigma that surrounds commercial sex markets (Benoit et al., 2018). It has been argued that changes in laws could dramatically alter the lived experiences of stigma for sex workers (Vanwesenbeeck, 2017; Sanders, 2018; Weitzer, 2018; Scoular et al., 2019) because the law, as part of contemporary governmentality, shapes norms (Scoular, 2010). The criminalisation of some forms of sex work, as a process of social control over ‘public’ female bodies in particular, means all sex work carries a deviant and stigmatising label (Becker, 1963).

5.5: Legitimate digital sex markets?

Visible and less economically viable forms of sex work, in particular street sex work, have been delegitimised through historical and contemporary legislation that has criminalised both the worker and, increasingly, the customer. Street sex workers do not add value to the state and, therefore, are not viewed as economic agents, but rather delegitimised and generally viewed as ‘bad’. Through the ‘logic of differentiation’ (Scott, 2011: 65) this has created space for a sexual entrepreneur who is a ‘hygienic and socially responsible subject’ (Scott, 2011:65). Adopting a ‘sexual entrepreneurship’ model (Harvey and Gill, 2011: 52), digital sex workers contribute to the capitalist economy through their economic capabilities to work and consume, whilst staying within the sexual limits of neoliberalism. This means ‘sexual entrepreneurs’ have the potential
economic value to support the market system. In *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault describes the figure of homo oeconomicus as ‘the [wo]man of enterprise and production’ (2008: 147). For Foucault, homo oeconomicus embodies an increase in marketisation, where governmentality is concerned with establishing ‘mechanisms of competition’ and ‘an enterprise society’ (2008: 243). In this context, all individuals in a neoliberal society are given value when economic active agents. For Foucault,

the enterprise society involves the generalisation of the economic form of the market […] throughout the social body and including the whole of the social system not usually conducted through or sanctioned by monetary exchanges (2008: 243).

However, despite the veneer of meritocracy, the logic of differentiation is not only classed, but also raced. As Scoular argues, racism and classism may seem ‘distant and accidental’ (2010: 31) but are actually central to the processes of governmentality and the normalisation of some sex entrepreneurs, and certain sex markets by differentiating from ‘Others’. The delegitimisation of migrant sex workers has been ongoing, as a result of activism and policies as part of the anti-trafficking movement to end ‘global slavery’ (see O’Connell Davidson, 2015 for a critical analysis of new slavery abolitionist movement). Without a more nuanced distinction of voluntary sex work and forced exploitation, the narratives and policies regarding anti-trafficking and slavery has meant it is increasingly difficult for migrant sex workers to work in the UK without surveillance and risk of deportation (Kempadoo, 2015). This is compounded by the informal regulatory space that has given rise to platform governance. Drawing on formal laws regarding ‘slavery’, platforms discriminate against those without a British passport, making it almost impossible for many migrants to make an income through the major sex work platforms in the UK. This was observed in *Adultwork*’s code of conduct and by a representative from SWARM:

They [platforms] have to comply with the police, but if you want to create an ad you have to put a picture of yourself with your address, scan of your ID, a picture of you in front of the street you live on. It is pretty thorough. I have some friends who were working illegally and somehow they were not able to set up a page. Their income was
really compromised. If you can’t advertise on it you are a bit f**ked. You have to use other sites like Craigslist, but it is not the same kind of service. It [Adultwork] has such a monopoly.

Through the logic of differentiation the ‘assumed ‘superior’, ‘liberated’ sexual agency of Western female sexual entrepreneurs is counterposed to many silenced Others’ (Gill, 2012: 493), in this instance the migrant, who is assumed to be an ‘illegal’ sex worker who cannot access the market. In a neoliberal context, the ‘deviant’ worker is not the entrepreneurial, tax paying sex worker, but the non-tax paying and therefore unprofitable ‘illegal’ migrant worker.

The uncertain regulatory framework has, in part, legitimised certain (profitable and unnoticed) forms of sex work, such as digital sex work through the delegitimisation of other (less economically viable to the state and more visible) forms of sex work. As Scoular states, the law does matter, in shaping subjects, spaces and forms of power in line with wider forms of neo-liberal governance (2010: 29). In this way, the delay in the formal law in directly addressing digital sex markets has played a role in the markets’ inception as a relatively legitimate market with platforms developing their own governance that are responsive to formal laws so as to maintain their position in the market. In this online space, sexual entrepreneurs are able to perform sexual entrepreneurship as ‘respectable’ neoliberal agents who are self-responsible and, therefore, economically viable.

I propose that the apparent freedom afforded to digital sex markets is insecure and subject to amendments in the regulatory framework, in response to fear of changes to the social order through online sexual consumption, particularly the now commonplace consumption of online porn. Sex markets are often open to moral panics and subsequent changes in policy directions (Bernstein, 2007b; Weitzer, 2007; Hubbard et al., 2008; O’Connell Davidson, 2015). Recent laws have brought incremental changes to online sexual consumption, such as age verification and the criminalisation of certain sexual acts in pornography. Furthermore, current parliamentary debates on digital governance remain concerned about trafficking and ‘modern
slavery’, and the sexual exploitation of children. These are areas of real concern, but are often conflated with sex markets for consenting adults. In the US, there has been a blanket ban on advertising sex work online, creating an uncertainty regarding the legal status of webcamming (Sanders et al., 2018b).

Recent legal developments in the USA have resulted in criminalising platforms if they advertise ‘prostitution’, even if the content is posted by a user. In March 2018, SESTA (HR1865) and FOSTA (SB1692) bills were passed by the US Senate by a large majority with the aim to remove the legal immunity that platforms had held in regard to being responsible for third party content, in particular reference to content advertising sex for sale by someone who has been trafficked or coerced into prostitution. There are two pertinent concerns with what has become commonly known as the FOSTA/SESTA laws.

First, the laws conflate consensual sex work with sex with those who are forced or coerced. Section 2 of Public Law 115 – 164 (commonly known as SESA/FOSTA), targets ‘websites that unlawfully promote and facilitate prostitution and websites that facilitate traffickers in advertising the sale of unlawful sex acts with sex trafficking victims’. Furthermore, the wording of the laws is vague enough that it has impacted not only the ability to advertise the sale of sex online, but sex workers’ ability to organise and build sex worker communities (Smith and Mac, 2018, survivorsagainstsesta.org, 2018).

Second, there is no ‘notice-and-takedown mechanism’ (Chamberlain 2018: 2189, Gillespie, 2017) in the laws that would give platforms a period of grace to remove the user content that violates SESTA/FOSTA. If a user posts content that is deemed liable, the platform is immediately at risk of criminal sanctions. This has produced over moderation or total prohibition of discussions that may be interpreted as a website facilitates prostitution. It has resulted in sections of ‘mainstream’ platforms being removed such as on Craigslist and Reddit,
and sex work platforms closing down, such as Switter, an alternative to Twitter used by sex workers (Chamberlain, 2018; Smith and Mac, 2018).

It is yet to be seen how this prohibitive law of consensual commercial sex has impacted the markets of digital sexual services in the USA. The fear of litigation under SESTA/ FOSTA laws will force platform owners to put digital sex workers and the content they post under greater scrutiny and policing. This scrutiny will not be experienced equally with race and nationality shaping surveillance practices. It is not a coincidence that since SESTA/FOSTA was passed in the USA, Adultwork has overhauled their terms and conditions making it almost impossible for those without a British passport to advertise on Adultwork. As Gillespie (2017) argues, governance by platforms is in part, a way to avoid further policies and restrictions imposed by government. In July, 2018 Sarah Champion, a Labour MP petitioned for a similar law to SESTA/ FOSTA in the UK banning the sale of sex in all public places, including the Internet. The change in law in the USA is exemplar of how changes in laws can be sudden and immediately impact the ability to make an income from sex work. The social and economic organisation of digital sex markets are tied to historical legal frameworks and the control of sexual deviancy ‘linked to the hegemonic and ideological perspectives of governments’ (Sanders et al., 2018a: 169). Thus, change in the current regulatory framework is very likely.

5.6: Conclusion

The current regulatory framework of commercial sex overwhelmingly focusses on eradicating ‘public’ forms of sexual commerce, and the ‘relative inattentiveness’ (Scoular, 2010: 13) of formal law in regard to digital sex markets may simply be a delayed reaction from the state in this complex, ever-changing and dynamic digital age that cuts beyond both regulatory and national borders. Governments are faced with globalised markets where national regulations are limited, due to consumption, production and labour taking place outside of national borders.
Therefore, new challenges arise in areas of labour, media, communications and consumption policy (Huws, 2017). Nevertheless, the lack of formal law means there is a proliferation of digital sex platforms that are currently operating in the shadow of the formal law, therefore in a quasi-criminal context. Platforms have developed their own governance which reflects the formal law, as well as the inclusion of rules the platforms deem appropriate in regard to ownership of images and videos, and the conduct of digital sex workers and customers. Overall, the combination of formal law regarding prostitution and pornography, and platform governance creates an uncertain regulatory framework. Overarching this uncertainty are the stigma and deviancy labels associated with commercial sex that are maintained and reinforced by the formal law. Despite processes of differentiation, the digital sex worker walks a fine line between being a sexual entrepreneur and a sexual deviant/criminal, navigating the stigmatising identity of sex work. The following chapter will continue discussions on digital sexual consumption in neoliberal Britain and the customers’ negotiation of being an ‘empowered’ consumer within ‘moral’ limits upheld by formal laws.
Chapter Six: The demand for digital sex markets: Customer sovereignty and conflicting labels

6.1: Introduction

In this chapter I argue that the demand for digital sex markets is situated in relation to the demand for other sex markets: direct sex work, pornography and dating markets, and that digital sex markets reflect the gender dynamics and the labels associated with purchasing sex. However, the uniqueness of digital sex markets is the choice, convenience, accessibility and a perceived sense of being less transgressive than purchasing direct sex, as indicated by customers in this study. Nevertheless, the deviancy label associated with buying sex, particularly direct sex work, remains and customers find ways to neutralise their ‘deviant’ consumer behaviour (Sykes and Matza, 1957). The data reveals that the men in the study often labelled their own behaviour as an addiction. This reflects the market qualities of convenience and accessibility produced by technological developments. Digital sex markets are always available to customers, and it is their responsibility to manage their consumption – when this was not achieved some customers labelled themselves as ‘sex addicts’, unable to control their behaviour. As argued in the previous chapters, the market, in some regard, is legitimated by the regulatory framework and the ‘logic of differentiation’ (Scott, 2011: 65), which legitimises digitally-mediated sex work by distancing it from other forms of sex work(ers), namely ‘prostitution’ and migrant sex workers.

In a neoliberal, late capitalist context like Britain, the economy is driven by consumption, which, as discussed in Chapter Two, upholds a consumer mentality in all situations, eroding the divisions of public and private spheres (Gilbert, 2013). Like Clarissa Smith argues, in neoliberalism all aspects of life are commercialised, it would be ‘ridiculous’ (2010: 108) to think sex and intimacy was exempt from consumer culture. Therefore, the promotion of the neoliberal consumer as active and empowered extends to digital sex markets.
However, as discussed in the previous chapter, there is a conservative moral agenda that upholds heterosexual monogamy, thus we see a creeping criminalisation of sexual consumers who are responsibilised under formal law to acknowledge their own morality. Therefore, as argued by Bernstein (2001, 2007b), purchasing commercial sex services is both normalised *and* problematised. This is seen in how the customers frame their sexual consumption behaviour. Despite customers’ concerns regarding how their behaviour is perceived by wider society, which is reflected in the neutralisation techniques they use, customers inhabit the role of a legitimate ‘sovereign customer’ (Korczynski, 2013: 31; Korczynski and Ott, 2004, 2006). The market positions the customers as sovereign and, therefore, in control of the service interaction; however, service workers have to navigate the constraints of the interaction and the limits of production without the customers’ illusion of sovereignty being shattered. Thus, to maintain the myth of sovereignty, digital sex workers use their emotional labour to manage the service interaction and adopt strategies to manage their own, and perform an authenticity demanded by customers (Hochschild, 1983).

The argument in this chapter is developed by firstly, locating the demand for digital sexual services within markets for other forms of commercial sex, as well as recognising that, in the digital age, the role of consumer/customer and producer/worker are not always separate. Secondly, this is followed by a discussion on what is distinct about digitally-mediated services, as a way further to situate digital sex markets. Digital sex markets question traditional constructions of public private time and space (Attwood, 2011; Nayar, 2017). The second section of this chapter unpacks the tensions of ‘deviancy’ and legitimate consumption and how this is made sense of by the customers in the study. The final section presents digital sexual consumption from both the service providers’ and the customers’ perspectives, emphasising the important differences in the approaches to the market interaction. This chapter is based on the analysis of the data collected on customers of digital sexual services (see Chapter 3).
includes qualitative interviews with five customers of digital sex services, an online survey completed by 22 customers and data drawn from interviews with other respondents who were keen to share their experiences of customers.

6.2: Situating the market

The data suggests that the consumption of digital sexual services forms part of customers’ wider commercial sexual habits and practices. Firstly, from the customers’ perspective, digitally-mediated services appear to be positioned somewhere between pornography and direct sexual services. Whilst the consumption of pornography and ‘prostitution’ have been framed as distinct, both in the legal framework (see Chapter Five) and in the sociological literature (for instance, Sanders, 2005b and Attwood, 2011), the data suggests that customers situate mediated services as neither prostitution nor pornography. Pornography is generally understood as a solo activity, that is non-reciprocal, based on self-satisfaction; although it can be consumed and experienced with others as a sexual activity (Tuck, 2009; Attwood, 2011). At the other end of the continuum of commercial sex activities are direct meet-ups, based on the co-presence of bodies and physical touch between customers and sex workers. Digitally-mediated services, including browsing and communicating with sex workers for free, do involve self-sexual gratification, if the consumer wishes, but they can also give the consumer a ‘sense of being with another’ (Biocca et al., 2003: 456) and feelings of emotional intimacy.

Secondly, all of those interviewed and the majority of the survey respondents purchased direct sex services, buying digitally-mediated forms of sex work as a convenient and less expensive alternative. This was the case for Clive, in his mid-fifties and a lifetime adult customer of sex markets, predominantly buying direct sexual services. He claimed to have become increasingly engaged in digitally-mediated modalities of commercial sex, particularly webcamming, as a strategy to limit his consumption of direct services. He had one to two
webcam sessions a week, limiting his spending to £100 per week. Similarly, Bruce was in his early sixties and a lifetime consumer of sexual services. He described a regular practice of buying direct services, which he did weekly, but ‘sometimes once every three weeks’. He also described episodes where he tried not to buy sex. During those times, and in between meeting sex workers, he sometimes engaged in phone sex and/or webcamming sessions. In addition, data mined from Adultwork showed that sex workers overwhelmingly sold direct services, and just 11 per cent of all ‘members’ only sold services that were digitally-mediated, thus suggesting direct sex work remains the most in demand service from the customers perspective.

Thirdly, reflecting changes in consumption in the digital age, workers and customers may inhabit both roles, removing the often-presumed separation of production and consumption (Ritzer, 2001; Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010). Antonio’s (webcammer, escort and customer, aged 45) account highlights a duality of roles in sex markets, embodying both customer and worker. At the time of the interview he was neither buying nor selling sex, but was working in a sex shop as a retail assistant. He was initially interviewed as a customer of digitally-mediated sexual services, but as the interview developed it transpired he had appeared in pornographic films and ‘tried’ webcamming and escorting. He had sold sex once, but ‘it was terrible. I did it sober’. He describes his involvement in pornographic films and the associated webcamming and escorting as an ‘ego boost’ and something he did during a mid-life crisis, as he ‘just needed validation’.

Furthermore, although recruited to this study as sex workers, it emerged that both Jason and Calvin had also engaged in commercial sex as customers. Calvin, aged 41, also took on a dual role, stating that he had bought services from female escorts, as well selling erotic massages and mediated services to men. Jason, aged 45, no longer bought services since meeting and marrying Fiona, someone who understood his ‘kinky’ behaviour, but he had spent much of his adult life buying direct services from sex workers. As he describes:
So, I was in an eighteen-year-relationship that was unhappy. I was seeing girls because it was easy, but as soon as I met my wife, I just knew. It wasn’t the thing of being a working girl. It wasn’t like that, it wasn’t like any of that, I just knew, and have been with her since, and that’s how I progressed into where we would do it [sell sex] as a couple.

At the time of the interview, Jason was selling erotic phone call services, performing webcam shows and taking part in ‘pay to attend’ sex parties with his wife, Fiona. These accounts suggest a rather different experience than the concept of ‘prosumer’ describes. Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010) are referring to the labour of consumers in the process of production e.g. consumers adding content to platforms, as discussed in Chapter Four, as a simultaneous action. Here, in some contexts, the men are sex workers, and in other contexts and at different times, they are customers of sexual services. This reveals the complexities of sex markets in the digital age and questions the assumed distinction made in much of the sex work literature between customers and workers.

Having a dual role, as described above, was not mirrored amongst the women in this study because of the role women generally take in sex markets as workers rather than customers (as discussed below), although, that is not to say it does not happen. Indeed, Paul (digital sex worker) described having a female customer that also worked in the sex industry.

In all the years I have done it, I have had two females book me. And interestingly one was an escort herself. And the other one, was a friend of a female escort who had just come out of a relationship and her friend was an escort said well let’s find you a male escort just to you know give you a bit of a confident boost and a bit of fun.

The data from this study does show that women establish their sex worker identity through the sexual consumption of underwear, sex toys and borrowing ideas from pornography. For instance, Kirsty (digital sex worker) explicitly states that her sexual labour is situated in her consumption of pornography:

Basically I am copying what I see online on porn and stuff. I am just copying the girls. And then I realised it was a bit too. I watch a lot of models on Myfreecams. That is how I have learnt what I do now.
She uses sexual consumption as an educative function to add value to her work, whereas Anita (phone and text sex worker) buys knickers cheaply, wears them for the day and sells them to customers at ten times the price as part of her portfolio of work (see the next chapter for a full discussion on portfolio working).

These accounts challenge the traditional dualism in literature on consumption that has tended to analyse consumption as separate to production (c.f. Wood, 2015; Pettinger, 2011, 2016). I argue that digital technologies blur the boundaries of production and consumption in sex markets. This is not a new argument, as it is established that digital technologies have blurred the boundaries between consumption and production, but the data reveals that it occurs, not just as ‘prosumers’, simultaneously producing and consuming. Rather, sexual consumption can be used for financial gain for workers, as part of their production of sexual services and goods.

As Paul’s comments show, digital sex markets do not operate exclusively within a heteronormative framework whereby men purchase sex and women sell sex. A third of women interviewed described having female customers, although this was a ‘one-off’ (Sylvia – escort, webcam, phone and text) or it took place in ‘couple of situations’ (Rhona – phone and IM, previously escort). Male sex workers, on the other hand, reported regular interaction with female clients, particularly with heterosexual couples requesting direct, offline sex. Paul (escort, webcam, phone worker) states he has ‘a small number of [heterosexual] couples that I wouldn’t say I meet on a regular basis, but they are regulars’.

Arguably, the well-ingrained assumption that men buy sex and women sell sex is unsatisfactory as it limits enquiry and analysis and makes invisible those whose homosexual practices, desires and identities are considered outside of this gendered norm. For instance, Paul publicly identified as heterosexual, yet mainly sold mediated sexual services to men, occasional direct services to women and heterosexual couples, and used digital sex markets to explore
sexual desires. Calvin also challenged sexual and gendered norms as he identified as being as ‘straight as they come’, yet, he also sold erotic massages, phone sex and webcamming sessions to men. This commercial sexual activity has been described in studies of male sex workers as ‘gay for pay’ (Minichiello et al., 2013: 265). In addition, Calvin had ambitious plans to sell sex to women, capitalising on the potential expansion of sex markets, although he acknowledged ‘this was quite difficult’ because ‘women can have sex for free’, based on the assumption that women do not need to buy, as men are always available for indiscriminate sex. The data reveals a diversity of genders and sexualities who engage as workers and customers, although predominately, digital sex markets remain heteronormative with men buying services and women selling them.

The gender dynamics underlying digital sex markets are related to established sex markets (prostitution, pornography), in that the demand for sexual services is predominately from men. All of the digital sex workers interviewed for this study, regardless of gender, had predominately male clients. All of the customers interviewed for this study identified as men, and results from the survey also indicated a predominately male customer base (See Appendix 9). Drawing on the economic model of prostitution produced by Della Giusta et al. (2009), the primary driving force of digital sex markets is economic. Women are more likely to provide services, due in part to the ‘dull economic compulsion that drives many women into sex work’ (O’Connell Davidson 2002: 94), and men create the demand, in part because of greater economic freedom to purchase sexual services. However, I do not wish to reduce the complex gendered social relations evident in this study merely to economics, as it is unmistakeable that the cultural production of gender, and the unequal social status of genders, is interwoven into the structures of digital sex markets and the exchanges between customers and workers. The heteronormative presentations of gender evident in digital sex markers is discussed later in the chapter.
Reflecting the economic model presented by Della Giusta et al. (2009) customers had access to economic capital and thus were able to pay for digital sexual services. Eighty per cent of the survey respondents were employed or self-employed. James identified as working class, but the customers were, according to their occupations, more likely to be lower-middle class and middle class. The status of customers in this study reflects the basic economic requirement to access digital sex markets. Furthermore, in a neoliberal context, the market is understood as a site of possibilities where self-fulfilment can be achieved, for those who can afford it. Sanders (2008) argues that sex markets are available to the middle classes because of the disposable income required. For customers, digital sex markets provide more anonymity and privacy than other sex markets, making them even more attractive. In a consumer society, consumption is promoted as an individualised response to self-realisation. Customers engage their ‘entrepreneurial masculinity’ (Cornwall, 2010: 10) and adopt a self-managerial approach using their economic resources to find sexual satisfaction (Hammond and van Hooff, 2019).

Digital sex markets do provide something different for customers that is not dating, watching pornography or physically having sex with a sex worker. Social presence theory provides a lens through which the motivations of customers in this study can be viewed, formed and understood. Short et al. (1976) first conceptualised social presence as a way to measure the degree of awareness of the other person in mediated interactions. They suggested the more cues available, the more likely a ‘sense of being with another’ (Biocca et al., 2003: 456) will develop. According to social presence theory, communication cues provided verbally and non-verbally, make the person in the interaction appear present, engaged and authentic, rather than ‘merely experienced as an artificial entity and not a social being’ (Oh et al., 2018: 2). Depending on the technology, varying levels of social presence will develop. This partly explains why webcamming has become a popular modality of sexual services as the moving images are supported by additional verbal and non-verbal information, as discussed in Chapter

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Four. There are more cues for workers to develop authentic interactions with customers to create a social interaction and sense of being with another. This is reflected in Antonio’s description of webcamming:

> I enjoyed it, to a degree. I enjoyed being sat there and chatting. I loved chatting to people, much more than showing off. I enjoyed people getting in touch, and asking me about my experience [being in pornographic films] and finding out about me. It was nice. There was something warm about it, actually. Especially if they got personal and asked if I was single, or what I liked. Actually, I could see a lot of loneliness behind it.

Bruce’s account of making erotic phone calls also suggests that developing a sense of knowing the digital sex worker can be part of the experience:

> It may sound stupid, but I like to feel like I will have an intelligent conversation. If I call someone and they say come on darling get your cock out I want to fuck you. I just say no. I like to have an intelligent conversation with someone.

Research with customers of direct sex work have found that motivations to buy sex are complex and multiple. Motivations are not just about sexual relief, but also desires for emotional intimacy (Sanders, 2008a; Birch, 2015; Hammond and van Hooff, 2019). This study has found that for some people, in some contexts, digitally-mediated sexual services can be a substitute for the physical co-presence achieved in direct sex work. As a sense of knowing and being with another person can be attained through mediated forms of communication (Short et al. 1976; Biocca et al. 2003; Oh et al. 2018).

Digital sex markets question traditional understandings of time and space. Understood as a substitute to buying direct sex, respondents reported mediated services to be more convenient, as they could access them from ‘the comfort of your own home’ (Clive), work or whilst travelling, at any time of day. Digital sex markets are more accessible than traditional forms, both geographically and materially. A customer’s desire to purchase sexual services was unrestricted by location and time. For Clive, the convenience of doing ‘it’ from his home has, to some extent, normalised the experience, as he no longer has to go to a location that he considered ‘seedy’:
With pornography and cams or whatever, you can be sitting in your home and think I just fancy doing that, whereas if you have go to put your coat on and have to go somewhere, which traditionally would have been quite seedy, but you know that this [webcamming] is a totally different experience.

Bruce, likes the fact that he can purchase services at any time of day and night, fitting his ‘manic moments’ into his busy life:

I prefer to meet face-to-face, but if I am having one of manic moments and it is Saturday morning, there isn’t going to be anyone for me to go and visit. I might have a million and one things I might need to get done. But it might be a half hour conversation. You aren’t just sitting there masturbating. It is talking. You are talking about sexual things and fantasies and encouraged to try this and try that.

This is evidence of the disruption to notions of public private time and space. Customers can purchase publicly available commercial sex services from the privacy of their own homes, any time of day. Bruce and Clive are limited neither by time pressures nor geography. These barriers to purchasing sex have been removed through digital communication technologies. Through the emotional labour of digital sex workers, customers are able to experience authentic interactions and feelings of being with another while simultaneously being alone in the comfort and convenience of their own home.

In addition to the convenient ease of access, digitally- mediated services are generally less expensive than direct services, therefore, providing a more affordable alternative. Discussions on pricing in Chapter Four show that prices are being pushed down thus making services more affordable to customers. Prices are easily comparable and workers discussed customers (mostly unsuccessfully) trying to negotiate prices.

The data also revealed that customers could experience sexual pleasure from browsing, therefore not having to pay for their sexual satisfaction. Ali’s account of his sexual consumption practices highlight the pleasure and satisfaction customers can have from browsing the extensive choice of sex worker profiles. Ali, who is married and in his mid-thirties, spends some time, most evenings, browsing sex worker profiles on different platforms and watching ‘freeviews’ on webcam-only platforms. The practice of browsing reduces the
risks of being ‘caught out’, something very important to Ali in regard to his consumption behaviour. Ali does not need to log on to the platforms, therefore avoiding a financial record of his sexual practices. As a result, he rarely spends money on online services and is still able to satisfy his sexual desires. Without spending any money, customers are able to browse platforms, view workers profiles and pictures, watch ‘freeview’ videos, contact sex workers and, on some webcam platforms, comment on the appearance and performance of sex workers.

From the workers’ perspective, customers browsing only generates a very small income, if any at all. As Sylvia, a digital sex worker, described:

They [the customers] come in to have a look, window shopping, they stay for a minute, they may stay for two. Chances are they go quite quickly. They might come back at a later time but they just browse you know. They’re the ones who are dropping money into your piggy box as it were, non-stop.

When she talked of ‘dropping money into your piggy box’, it conjured up an image of a child gratefully receiving pennies from their benevolent parent. Sylvia’s description of an exchange like this is starkly different to Ali’s interpretation, who takes pleasure in saving money by getting the best value for it, only spending around £5 a month without consideration for the workers who are producing the content he is browsing. Piecemeal payments, common in platform-managed labour, put the financial and social risks onto the browsing consumer. For Ali, browsing and contacting sex workers satisfies his sexual needs. As he states:

Ali: Every few days I text a lot of numbers, but then I end up going home.
Helen: Is there an excitement in there?
Ali: Yeah! It gives me some pleasure making the calls.

Robinson and Moskowitz’s (2013) study of men seeking men online found browsing and emailing to be an erotic act, playing a legitimate role in their sexual lives. Sanders et al. (2018b) also found browsing was a meaningful part of the experiences of men who buy sex online in the UK. The results of Sanders et al.’s (2018b) online survey of 1,323 customers found the majority of those who took part used the Internet to ‘explore commercial sexual services’ several times a
week, with 13.6 per cent browsing services several times a day. Adding to this literature, the findings from this study suggest browsing and emailing can be an erotic act, something that is freely available to the customers, but at the expense of the unpaid, or low-paid, labour of digital sex workers.

Browsing can only take place if there is an abundance of choice to leisurely survey. The consumer experience in the digital age is partly defined by choice, and sex markets are no exception. As discussed in Chapter Four, the architecture of the platforms ensures customers are aware of the choice available, encouraging them to take on the role of the ‘chooser’. For instance, webcam-only platforms often have more than 40 small boxes, each showing a pixelated image or streaming a live sex show. The shows may include penetrative sex, group sex, sex with adult toys, same gender sex, or a strip show. Furthermore, there are numerous sex work platforms to browse and hundreds and thousands of porn sites. In this way, ‘technology enables and even encourages an increasing specification and refinement of tastes’ (Illouz, 2007: 86). The choice offered by technology, at the convenience of the consumer is celebrated by respondents. Ali notes, ‘on Adultwork, you can filter out and everything’. Similarly, a respondent to the online survey confirms that technology has ‘given more options instead of phoning brothels for potluck’. Clive also benefitted from the ‘very, very broad range [of women]’ available on Adultwork. The choice described by customers supports the argument put forward in previous chapters, that this is a saturated market that ultimately profits sex work platforms.

6.3: Customer sovereignty in transactions with digital sex workers

I draw on the concept of the ‘enchanted myth of customer sovereignty’ (Korczynski, 2013: 31), as using this lens enables an understanding of the tensions and contradictions evident when production and consumption meet in digital sex markets. Korczynski and Ott (2004, 2006) use
the concept of ‘sovereign consumer’ in terms of both a neo-classical economic figure, as a rational autonomous choice maker, and as a pre-modern figure, a sovereign who has ‘relational superiority and status of importance’ (Korczynski, 2013: 31) over those they reign. Korczynski and Ott argue that the management of service industries promotes the enchanted myth by providing space for consumers to feel in control or sovereign, whilst simultaneously giving space for workers to expertly guide the customer through the constraints of production. In this context, the platforms operate as management, providing the consumer with the ‘pleasure of choice’, placing him as the powerful choice maker, yet within standardised and predictable interactions; however, there are limits to the consumer’s sovereignty which is negotiated through the emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) of digital sex workers.

Emotional labour, as conceptualised by Hochschild (1983), focusses on how service workers use their emotions to manage the interaction between themselves and the customers, and the strategies adopted to manage their potentially conflicting emotions in order to protect their sense of self. The engagement of emotional labour by sex workers is well-documented (Chapkis, 1997; Sanders, 2005b; Hausbeck and Brents, 2009; Brents and Jackson, 2013), in regard to negotiating a separate work identity, and in the relationship between themselves and their customers (Sanders, 2005b). Digital sex workers also deploy their emotional labour to perform authenticity (Nayar, 2017). As Korczynski and Ott (2004) argue, the customer may become disillusioned if their lack of sovereignty becomes apparent, therefore, if the customer seeks authenticity and/or intimacy in their mediated service, digital sex workers use their emotional work to achieve this.

There are constraints to production and, like mass consumerism more generally, digital sexual consumption is, to some extent, defined by processes of standardisation. As Ritzer (1998) argued in his thesis of Macdonaldisation, standardisation of services produces a predictable experience for the consumer. The consumer is excited by the choice the platform
exhibits, yet is secure in their consumption choices because of the predictability of the experience. Both the worker and the customer know what they are expected to do. Hausbeck and Brents (2009) identified this standardisation in sex markets, predicting the expansion of mass consumerism in the construction of sex markets through digital communications.

This process of standardisation is evident within the interaction between customers and the digital sex workers. In Sylvia’s description of telephone services it is clear that there is a shared (hetero) sexual script that she uses to co-produce the desired outcome for the customer – sexual climax. Sylvia and her customers share conventions that allow for them both to ‘participate in a complex act involving mutual dependence’ and, as Gagnon and Simon (1973: 18) suggest, the sexual script adopted is explicitly gendered. Sylvia reassures the customer, giving him sexual value and meets his desire for mutual satisfaction: ‘Look at you. You’re gorgeous. Yes, Yes, such a turn on’ (Sylvia referring to her verbal expressions during a telephone session). She refers to the sexual script she adopts in a nonchalant way – ‘yeah, yeah, blah blah’ – she knows the script and what is expected of her. There is a shared set of conventions based on heterosexual male pornography that gives the male customer a sense of power through the worship of his sexual prowess.

The power of the consumer is further ratified as he has relational superiority as the ‘chooser’, maintaining control of the transaction, choosing to log off or terminate the call when he feels like it. Although both worker and consumer can terminate the call or webcam session, the power is decidedly with the consumer due to the finances involved in the transaction. The power relations are maintained and reinforced throughout the interaction, as a significant part of the interaction is based on attending to the customers’ desires and requests. Weiss (2017) describes webcam interactions as explicitly gendered, not male/female per se, but identifying the submissive, deferential role of the webcammer as feminine and the demanding ‘sovereign’ customer as masculine. This insight is useful in moving the analysis of the interaction beyond
specific genders whilst recognising the power relations are located in constructions of feminine, all-serving, permissive worker and a masculine, powerful and in control customer.

The standard (hetero) sexual script commonly adopted in interactions between the customer and digital sex workers requires workers to employ their personalised emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) to perform authenticity in order to maintain the enchanted ‘myth of customer sovereignty’ (Korczynski, 2013: 31). As Bruce stated:

If you get someone whose English is not their first language I find that they are just sort of working from a script. And that is not just on. All they have got to do is “wow! How big is your cock”; it feels like you are going through the motions.

To maintain the power he has as a consumer, Bruce needs the illusion of exclusivity for him to remain in control and for the experience to feel authentic. Central to the ‘enchantment’ of consumerism is the ‘ability to create an illusion which is known to be false but felt to be true’ (Campbell, 1987: 78). On some level, Bruce knows that he is not sovereign, but wants to continue the experience as if he is. The consumer demands the illusion of authenticity, as Clive states:

It is rather like, you know, there are girls that go on cam who ooze insincerity from the first thing they type to you. You know. You can just see they are going through a performance. So erm, you know that just doesn’t appeal to me at all.

As Ritzer argues, too much standardisation and the consumer will feel the ‘coldness and impersonality’, thus disturbing the need for consumption to ‘function as dream worlds’ (2001: 422). Digital sex workers walk a fine line between too much efficiency and predictability and performing authenticity. Kirsty (webcammer, phone and text worker) describes how she employs emotional labour to present a ‘smiley and happy’ version of herself so as to keep the customers satisfied.

On webcam I have to sit there and be smiley and happy all the time. In real life I am a normal person up and down. I don’t want to be just sat there with a big smile on my face 24/7. So when I come offline, I have achy cheeks from smiling so much. On webcam I try and be nice to people but in real life I don’t. I wouldn’t, if someone just said something, like they were quite bossy. If someone said that in real life I wouldn’t stand
for it. It is literally an act. It is just literally acting. You know what the person in front of you wants to see. You just act it out.

She draws on the standardisation and predictable of the service in her act and ensures the customers sense of sovereignty is maintained. Penelope recognises that part of her role as a webcammer is to maintain this illusion of authenticity; therefore, she uses her emotional and sexual labour to enchant, or re-enchant the customers:

It’s [a successful interaction] in the fantasy. It’s in the role play. It’s in listening to these men’s thoughts and feelings. They can actually relive this inside the space in pixilation. They would believe anything they’re told online, almost. That in itself, the fact that I’m a service provider. I am charging X money per minute late at night. It hasn’t occurred to these people.

Penelope implies that the fantasy goes beyond the role of customer, and that many of her customers believe that she sexually desires them, or at least is authentic in her desire to create an intimate connection and for them to feel satisfied. As indicated by Bruce and Clive, in some contexts, standardisation needs to be hidden from customers so they do not become disillusioned.

The process of standardisation is not limited to interactions between customers and workers, but is visually apparent in the sex workers’ profile images. As Clive notes, ‘If you went on a website like Myfreecams. They are much, much more uniform. Much more American’. The majority of profile pictures on Adultwork and webcam platforms show close ups of breasts, bottoms and genitals generating a uniformity to the ‘choice’ available. Using images not depicting the sex worker’s face was a strategy adopted by some digital sex workers to protect their privacy, nevertheless the positioning of bodies and clothes worn, as well as the body parts displayed, does create a level of uniformity. This uniformity required for a standardised, predictable and comparable service limits the creativity available to digital sex workers. Anita, a phone and text sex worker, describes how digital sex workers create standardisation amongst their profiles because they compare and copy other sex workers’
online presentations, assessing what will be the most lucrative way to present themselves in a highly competitive market place. As she states:

I had one young girl wanting to know how the Amazon wish list worked. And then she started copying the style of my photos. What is that film called? Single, white female. So you have to be careful with the girls. You have to remember they are there for the money.

Hausbeck and Brents (2009) discuss how mass-produced pornography that is widely available on television, magazines and online limits the idea of sexual pleasure and desires, and creates standardised and predictable sexual behaviours. Certain facial expressions, body poses and noises become almost a caricature of sexual desire. As Kirsty explained, she uses pornography to gain ideas on how to perform as a webcammer. This ‘borrowing’ from mainstream, heterosexual pornography is evident on the platforms observed in this research, where people – mostly women – pose, move and dance in a manner that is associated with mass-produced pornography: gyrating hips, licking lips and/or squeezing breasts together. This hypersexualised imagery of an active female sexual subject is seen across the media and is well documented by culture and media studies scholars (Attwood, 2009; Gill, 2008, 2012; Gill and Schraff, 2011) and, therefore, not particularly unique to digital sex markets, although it is explicit and adds to the cultural production that frames women as sexually ‘up for it’, and available for (heterosexual) men.

Although there are variations in the profile images, the ‘product is identifiable and similar’ (Pettinger, 2016: 55). This not only gives consumers a feeling of security, it also leads to greater competition amongst producers (digital sex workers), as noted by Anita in the earlier extract. Drawing on Du Gay’s concept of ‘economies of replication’ (1996: 102), this pushes prices down, ultimately benefitting the customer. As Rachel, a webcam and escort provider, explains:

You have a look, and you see how much other people are charging for their services, and then you work out where you fit in. So you might look through and go, “Oh, there’s this person, a professional dom [dominatrix] and they’re charging x. I’m really good at
being a dom, but being a dom is not all I want to do, so I might charge slightly less than a lot of the dom services, and that would mean that I would then get more clientele. It appeals to a wider audience. If I price myself as a dom, then people could be even be put off if they were just into normal stuff. There's more girls who’ll actually offer that service.

Rachel’s comments support the argument put forward in Chapter Four. She considers the moral judgements of worth in a competitive market that pushes prices down. The prices she sets are based on qualitative judgements and quantitative calculations (Callon and Muniesa, 2005).

At the same time as digital sex markets are produced according to principles of mass consumerism: standard, predictable, quantifiable and identifiable services, there is also resistance to the complete commercialization of sexuality (Hausbeck and Brents, 2009). Customers and workers resist the interaction being cold and impersonal and are able to negotiate their own versions of intimacy through digitally-mediated services. Based on Zelizer’s (2005) conceptualisation of intimacy, the respondents did describe intimate social relations that were based on a continuum in social relations that can be physical, informational and/or emotional, and involves a degree of knowledge, attention and trust. Several customers expressed the desire for a reciprocal relationship. Clive, a customer of webcams, confirms:

I am quite keen to have some kind of relationship which is why I like chatting to them. I like them to strip, I like them to do whatever they do. I do like to talk to them and find out about them, and engage with them.

In this extract, Clive wishes to have some degree of knowledge and information about the sex worker. He stresses throughout the interview that he likes to chat with intelligent women and that it is not just about ‘being attractive and naked’ or ‘stripping and masturbating’, but rather about an authentic experience where he can ‘find out about them and engage with them’. He suggests that there are very few women on the platforms that can offer this service to him. He prefers a more intimate, one-to-one experience so he chooses to pay for private web cam shows and does not enjoy the sex work platforms where many customers are watching the same show.
Similarly, Bruce also stresses the talking aspect of the interaction: ‘you aren’t just sitting there masturbating. It is talking’, thus suggesting the interaction is more meaningful than a cold and impersonal market transaction (Ritzer, 2001; Hausbeck and Brents, 2009).

Arguably, both Bruce and Clive use techniques of neutralisation because ‘qualifying the norms is an extension of common practice rather than a gesture of complete opposition’ (Sykes and Matza, 1957: 668). In other words, forming a meaningful interaction based on reciprocal engagement through talking is more in line with conventional intimate behaviour between two people, whereas the non-reciprocal masturbatory ‘autoerotic mode of consumption’ (Tuck, 2009: 78) is popularly imagined as ‘abnormal’ or deviant’ sexual practice. By drawing on the theory of neutralisation, I do not mean to suggest that there is something inherently ‘deviant’ about the customers’ behaviour: that their behaviour ought to be neutralised because the marketisation of sex and intimacy is ‘abnormal’. Rather, I am suggesting that customers may feel the need to narrate their experiences in line with conventional ideas about intimacy because of dominant cultural values regarding men who pay for sex, thus maintaining the impression that their desires are not out of place (Goffman, 1959). However, the data does suggest that customers do seek meaningful, authentic interactions that produce feelings of intimacy through digitally-mediated encounters. As a respondent from the online survey noted, ‘the Internet has humanized sex workers by interacting with them directly… I have very good friends on Myfreecams’.

This resistance to standardisation is further substantiated by accounts from digital sex workers. Five female digital sex workers – who only provided technology-mediated sexual services – spoke at length about establishing relationships with regular customers. Megan, who has an online presence as a ‘glamour model’ stated, ‘some of them want to be your friend. They want to know you’. She capitalises on this desire and sells access to her social media accounts and photo shoots challenging traditional dualism of public/private. In order to authenticate the
relationship as intimate, some customers show care, attention and emotional support (Zelizer, 2005).

Megan: I mean like there is this one guy. He is really sweet. When I was in uni. I made a tweet that said something like my heating had gone off in the house. It was so cold. He sent me. He knew that I had five other girls. And he sent us 6 heaters. So one for each bedroom. And he sent us a load of money to get like people in. He was so sweet. He is still someone I talk to now.

Helen: Have you met him?

Megan: I met him cos I had a studio day/photo shoot. And I put on Twitter if anyone is a photographer and wants to shoot me. You can rent hour slots. And he was like I want to take pictures of you. I was ok. Come down. And even then the hour would be what I would charge the photoshoot. He gave me like double it. I was so thankful.

From her account, customers were keen to purchase familiarity, possession of personal knowledge and feelings of caring. Megan sells access to aspects of her private life as part of her commodified subjectivity, allowing customers to show care through buying gifts and considering her wellbeing. Furthermore, Rhona, who at the time of the interview had recently stopped selling direct sexual services to pursue a writing career, instead offered instant messaging and telephone services to supplement her income. On her Adultwork profile it states that she offers ‘online GFE [girlfriend experience] or cyber affairs’, suggesting intimacy is desired through mediated forms of communication. Sanders’ (2008a) research on men who buy sex from women claims there is evidence of conventional behaviours in commercial sex encounters. To some extent, and in some instances, this is replicated with digitally-mediated services, as there is evidence of courtship rituals, communication, sexual familiarity, the desire for mutual satisfaction, and emotional and intimate connections.

The need for a meaningful and personal connection for some customers is captured in Rachel’s comment:

There is an influx [of customers] in spring time, summer time is quiet. I get thousands of messages on Christmas day ‘bless ’em’. The ones I like are a bit hopeless, but hilarious. Some of them the young ones, 23-years-olds, are needy in their own little world. Some customers I have known for seven years. They share their lives with me, assuming it is true. Send pictures of their grandchildren, you can’t help but like them.
Rachel describes the need for some customers to feel intimate with her, and that she, like Megan, does experience enjoyment in the market transaction, suggesting mediated services can produce a meaningful interaction that feels authentic to the customer. This challenges Tuck’s assertion that mediated sexual services are based on an ‘autoerotic mode of consumption’ (2009: 78) where the other person involved is an object, rather than a subject in the interaction. Based on this research, I argue that workers were able to create a feeling of being with another and that customers of digitally-mediated sexual services did not only seek an ‘autoerotic mode of consumption’ (Tuck, 2009: 78), but desires for sexual satisfaction coexisted with desires for meaningful and authentic interactions that created feelings of intimacy.

6.4: Customers and processes of self-legitimisation

The customers’ sovereignty is legitimated through a number of market devices beyond the interaction between the worker and the customer. These include legal, economic and discursive devices. As argued in Chapter Five, the law – as part of wider regulatory mechanisms – legitimises/delegitimises certain sex markets (Scott, 2011; Scoular, 2010; Carline, 2011). However, all forms of commercial sex are associated with ‘deviancy’ labels, hence the neutralisation techniques used by Clive to differentiate himself from more exploitative and illegal sex markets by calling men who buy sex in those markets ‘ghastly’. However, through processes of differentiation, digital sex markets are viewed as ‘healthy’ and ‘ordered’, even acceptable (Scott, 2011:56). As Bruce states:

I think because people can access it online and work out of their own property. I feel there is more safety, because previously I would have had to have. There was no way for me to sort of know where I was going. It [buying sex online] is definitely safer, cleaner.

There is no formal law regarding the purchase of digitally-mediated sexual services, therefore, customers do not come under direct scrutiny from law enforcement agencies. This reduces the
risk of criminal sanctions in comparison to purchasing services in other sex markets. Amongst the customers interviewed, there was a relaxed attitude to digital records; for instance, Ali was careful to avoid leaving a financial record but was less worried about his digital history.

The process of legitimisation is also evident through economic market devices. As discussed in the previous chapter, platform-mediated sex work has brought this aspect of sex markets into the formal economy, as there is a financial record that is recordable and therefore taxable. Whilst collecting interview data, it appears Adultwork has started charging VAT on all online transactions of goods and services. As Paul, a digital sex worker describes:

It [paying VAT] is to be honest. The site [Adultwork] should have been charging VAT years ago, I assume. And they have just been found out they should’ve been doing it from the local VAT office and have been told how to apply the charges. There has been no change in provision over vat-able services over the internet. I just think they weren’t charging it when they should’ve been.

Here Paul accepts that the tax should be charged to customers, and sees it as the honest thing for Adultwork to be doing, therefore making his own income more legitimate. The perceptions of the institutional framework influence how digital sex markets are judged by those engaged in the markets, as well as wider opinion.

Clive, unlike the other men in this study, was more likely to understand himself predominantly as a ‘rational’ legitimate consumer, justifying his involvement in the sex industry as due to the lack of sex with his wife. As he states: ‘My wife and I have not had sex for 16 years. Since my son was born. So that is basically why I get involved in doing this.’ Underlying Clive’s rationalisation and justifications is what Hollway has described as ‘the male sexual drive discourse’ (1984: 67); that is, Clive has to find a way to satisfy his ‘biological’ sexual need. He uses this as a basis for action, which is met by his consumption practices in the market economy (Cornwall, 2010). Constructions of hegemonic masculinities are based on the idea of the ‘rational’ man (Connell, 1995; Hammond and van Hooff, 2019). He rationalises his involvement in sex markets as a solution to the lack of sex in his marriage.
As part of his display of hegemonic masculinity, he narrates knowledge and consideration regarding the debates around prostitution. He asserts his intellectual rationality. He mentions reading Polly Toynbee in *The Guardian* and listening to discussions on BBC Radio 4 on sex work. He legitimises his sexual practices, as he seeks services from ‘those who enjoy selling sex’. As he states: ‘well it varies slightly, but for the most part, people that do it [those who sell sex] seem to enjoy doing it’ and that he is a ‘reasonably affluent person trying to engage with educated people who have chosen to do something they happen to like’. He acknowledges he could be ‘completely wrong’ and that he deals with a very small sector of the sex industry and that the ‘universe I am talking about is absolutely minute and Polly Toynbee in *The Guardian* is talking about 99% of it that is horrid and oppressive and ghastly’. As a middle-class white man he rationalises his legitimacy to use the market to seek self-satisfaction and self-fulfilment.

Like sex markets more generally, digital sex markets are ‘messy, complicated and contradictory’ (O’Connell Davidson, 2014: 3). Processes of legitimation and presentations of rational ‘sovereign’ consumers, coexisted with customers’ accounts of navigating and making sense of the deviancy, pathological, and/or criminal labels surrounding those who pay for sex, due to the association with commercial sex markets more broadly (Sanders, 2008a; Birch, 2015).

### 6.5: Labelling: Deviancy and pathology

Becker (1963) provides an interactionist understanding of the process of labelling, arguing it is not the act in itself that is deviant but rather it is the reaction of others who view the behaviour as unacceptable. Importantly, Becker argues that the label of deviance is dependent on the social context. In the UK, buying sex has a long history of being framed as deviant, and popular
discourse surrounding the identity of a man who pays for sex is one of ‘deviant’. Customers navigated the stigmatising label of sexual ‘deviant’ in a number of ways.

Ali’s decision to engage in technology-mediated services was to avoid what he considered rather more deviant behaviour – meeting a sex worker for sex. Based on his own morality, he had decided that mediated services were less ‘bad’. The legitimacy he had assigned to digitally-mediated services was reflected in his responses in the two interviews with him. The first interview was mediated by the messenger service, WhatsApp. In attempting ‘the management of undisclosed discrediting information about self’ (Goffman, 1963: 58), Ali did not disclose that he met sex workers for direct sexual intercourse, but maintained he only engaged in browsing sex work platforms and occasionally paying for webcam sessions. It was only in the second interview, conducted face-to-face, that he explained that every few months he would pay to have sex. Ali appeared to struggle with the internalisation of what he considers morally ‘bad’ sexual behaviour. He attempted to offset his sexual practices and behaviour through what he (and others) consider to be more positive actions. Ali states:

Being busy and things. Doing better things instead, in the meantime. Doing good for humanity. I am also involved in some charity events. If I am busy with that then I don’t do this.

Further evidence of the awareness of the perceived deviancy of customers’ behaviour was the ‘discourses of respectability’ (Skeggs, 1997: 1) that Clive drew upon to distance himself from other men who purchased sexual services. For instance, he describes customers on Captain69, an online forum for men who pay for sex, as ‘not like-minded at all’ and men who buy sex from women who are trafficked as ‘absolutely ghastly’. Clive does not wish to fulfil the sexual ‘deviant’ label that is commonly applied to men who purchase sex. He has assessed his own behaviour against others who buy sex, considering himself different. However, he is conflicted as his view of his behaviour ‘fluctuates enormously between it being a magnificent and liberating thing to do, to a form of oppression that I disapprove of’. There is a reluctant
acceptance that this ‘hobby’, as he describes it at one point in the interview, is something that he cannot shake, despite ‘probably a deep rooted disapproval’ (Clive) of his engagement with the sex industry. The ‘deviant’ label does not stop him from buying sex, but does mean he keeps his behaviour secret, avoiding the disclosure of ‘discrediting information’ (Goffman, 1963: 48).

Many men in the study – sex workers, customers and those who took on dual roles – pathologised their sexual behaviour, claiming their activities were grounded in addictive behaviour, potentially in an attempt to navigate the deviancy label often associated with buying sexual services. Explaining their commercial sexual behaviour through a lens of medicalisation and biologist assumptions, Antonio, Bruce and Paul explicitly self-diagnosed as ‘sex addicts’.

Bruce makes sense of buying sex, and mediated sex, by pathologising his behaviour. In the following extract, it is clear that he feels like his purchasing of sex is out of control, losing hours to ‘mega manic phases’:

I have had them in the past where I sort of lost six hours. I don’t know what I have done. I have to retrace my steps almost. Thinking what did I do? What did I do? And now, if I am having what I call an absent mega phase is coming on then I know it is coming on. I recognise this now. I do have these mega manic phases and once went to a lap dancing club and spent 600 quid.

Bruce asserts that he cannot always control the impulse to buy sexual services whether that is in a ‘lap dancing club’, ‘face-to-face’, or webcam and telephone services. His lack of impulse control is evident in the significant percentage of his income (20-25%) that he spends on commercial sex. He states:

I am trying to cut myself back as I can’t go on spending money. It is ridiculous money. I could’ve brought myself an Aston Martin, a house, I could have a really secure pension fund, or it could have paid for the kitchen from heaven.

Like Ali, in an attempt to control his commercial sexual practices, he seeks alternative hobbies to distract him from his overwhelming urges to find sexual satisfaction through the market.
If I get these manic thing [...] If I keep busy with a lot of things to do. I don’t have these manic states. I go on quiz shows. If I am getting on one of those [quiz shows]. I spend a lot of time revising and I manage to control.

For Bruce, the ease of access to digital sex markets means he is able to respond to his compulsive urges instantly, however, his access is limited by economics; however, for some male sex workers, the pleasure and sexual gratification of selling mediated services are supplemented by an income, therefore, the experience is not limited by money. Paul’s account suggests that he was aware that he needed to self-impose limits on the sexual gratification he was experiencing from his role in the market.

I got a bit addicted to it in a way really. I think it was the day before Good Friday in 2007 that I set it all up. And of course being off work that long weekend I found there was just so much activity on there cos the long weekend. I literally made hundreds of pounds that weekend. I was up till four o'clock on the Saturday night into Easter day and I was still like seeing family through the day. Going to see parents on Easter day but my mind was like I want to be home earning this money. It was like almost an addiction in a way. And likewise you could see the addiction the other end where people were just wanting to chat. Some guy was on there for about 2 hours. Spent well over £100. Just chatting on the site effectively. I suppose there is the addiction on both sides. And people can get addicted to offering the services as well.

Throughout the interview he described living life with moderation as far as possible, consciously aware of his desire to go to extremes. This conscious requirement to self-impose limits so as not to give in to extreme behavior was echoed in Antonio’s account.

Antonio stated that his experience with the sex industry ‘goes hand-in-hand’ with his drug and alcohol use, which is the result of his ‘addictive personality’. As he explains:

I started taking amphetamines, being up for 48 hours getting really sexually aroused. I would stay on a chat line for ages at 4-8p per minute. I would not stop until I met somebody. I would not hang up the phone until I met someone. It was very obsessive and very compulsive.

At the time of the interview he was not drinking or taking drugs and had also stopped acting in pornography and webcamming. Furthermore, he also stated that he had come off all ‘hook-up apps’ as these also triggered compulsive behaviour. He asserted that his involvement in porn production instigated taking drugs after several years of abstaining from drug use.
Sex addiction has yet to be included in the most recent edition of *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (2013), nor is it recognised by the World Health Organisation’s *International Classification of Diseases* (2016). Yet, there is a growing movement to recognise sex addiction as a behavioural disorder (see Karila et al., 2014; Laier et al., 2014; Weinstein et al., 2015; Schiebener et al., 2015). Like other scholars, I question the value of the concept of sex addiction and suggest it is being constructed as a pathology and one that is a growing social problem by those who oppose pornography (Prause et al., 2015) and have a moral agenda to constrain and restore heterosexuality to married monogamous relationships (Klein, 2002; Ley, 2012).

In this instance, some men in this study draw on sex addiction as a way to neutralise their involvement in the sex industry (Sykes and Matza, 1957), knowing that buying sex, as well as viewing pornography, is popularly imagined as ‘deviant’ and/or ‘abnormal’. The men who used a lens of addiction to make sense of their behaviour also took responsibility to ‘correct’ and control their behaviour. Either way, these men understood that their sexual behaviour was considered excessive and unusual in wider discourses. In response to this, they adopted an individualised understanding of their behaviour. They did not view their behaviour as part of the broader political economy that is largely underpinned by consumption. As Tuck argues, in late capitalism, ‘restraint’ must be the property of the individual rather than the market, which must remain ‘free’. (2009: 83). This is the ‘a/morality paradox of neoliberalism’ (Cheng and Kim, 2014: 357). On the one hand, the British neoliberal state has a limited moral interest in how individuals make money and, as seen in the previous chapters, some forms of sexual entrepreneurialism are actively encouraged by the marketisation of sex and intimacy and the reduction of welfarism, which is replaced by new requirements of self-responsibilisation. On the other hand, neoliberalism, as a form of governmentality, is not free from moral codes regarding gender and sexual norms (Cheng and Kim, 2014). Through the market, consumers of
digital sex markets are awarded freedom and choice, yet simultaneously required to work hard so as not to deviate too far from normative sexual behaviour and practices.

6.6: Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown that digitally-mediated sexual services are purchased as part of wider practices of sexual consumption. The demand for these types of services comes predominately from men, and the supply from women; however, the research has shown the complexity and diversity of commercial sex in the digital age, by identifying that customers and workers embody dual roles. There were men in this study who, in different periods of their lives, had bought and sold sexual services. Furthermore, women in this study mobilised their sexual consumption within their sexual labour. Thus, I argue this is a more complex reality than the concept of ‘prosumer’ allows for and requires further research and a move away from an analysis that positions production and consumption as separate in sex markets.

I have theorised the customers’ behaviour within the framework of consumer sovereignty. In a consumer society, where consumption is central to the neoliberal political economy, the customers in this study felt entitled to purchase legally feelings of intimacy and sex through digitally-mediated sexual services. Indeed, as argued in Chapter Two, in late capitalist, neoliberal Britain, there is an ethic of self-satisfaction that drives the economy. Therefore, as active and empowered customers, they can demand authenticity in a market where there is an abundance of choice. In the role of ‘chooser’ customers have economic power and are able to use their relational superiority in the market, choosing where, and with whom, to spend money. Therefore, digital sex workers work hard to maintain the illusion of sovereignty, carefully navigating the expectations of the customers, performing authenticity when required.

However, there is a paradox in neoliberalism that means customers also viewed their sexual consumption as problematic. The ‘deviancy’ label that is applied to buying sex predates
neoliberalism, but in this context the responsibility to control their sexual desires is placed onto the individual, despite the increasing availability of sex markets brought about, in part, by transformations in digital communication technologies. Some customers adopted a narrative of addiction, thus individualising their behaviour and taking responsibility for their sexual consumption. This, as argued in Chapter Five, is part of wider processes of governmentality that responsibilises citizens for their own moral behaviour. The data has shown that the market provides extensive access, convenience and an abundance of choice – often for free – which meant customers had to self-govern and be responsible for their behaviour. The customers, therefore, embody conflicted feelings brought about by a consumer society in late capitalism.
Chapter Seven: Working lives: Motivations, strategies and the negotiation of stigma

7.1: Introduction

This chapter focuses on the narratives of digital sex workers who, in general, approached their work as entrepreneurs: self-responsible, innovative, competitive and strategic workers (Marques, 2010; Gill and Schraff, 2011; Taylor, 2015). I argue that this form of work is part of a general shift in the labour market in recent decades away from a ‘standardised model of employment’, that provided ‘continuous, contractually, formalised employment’ (Huws, 2013: 2), in which the entrepreneur has emerged as the ideal way of working, offering the promise of flexible working hours, which is both financially and creatively rewarding (Gill, 2008; Luckman, 2015; Ikonen, 2018; Taylor, 2018); therefore, this chapter adds to the literature on new models of working, in particular, digital labour managed by platforms.

In this chapter I identify specific gender dynamics apparent in the motivations reported by workers to engage in digital sex work. For those in the study who identified as gender-fluid or men, the overarching reported motivation to engage as workers were sexual and gender exploration, with less emphasis on economic need than the women in this study. The motivations of the women in this study reflect well-known gendered inequalities of the labour market and the socio-economic position of women more generally (Schlager and Klatzer, 2014; Gill, 2014; Huws, 2016). The women participants were more likely to frame their labour as an enterprising activity to manage economic risk. Their approaches were varied, with some women framing the work as temporal and part-time, and able to fit around other commitments, with others adopting a more long-term approach to sex work, developing a ‘micro-celebrity status’ and building a career, through their digital sexual labour. In many cases, workers reported digital communication technologies aiding movement between the services they
offered, as well as facilitating mobility in and out of sex markets, thus developing a ‘portfolio’ approach.

Navigating the enduring and historical stigma associated with sex work was also narrated by respondents through a lens of gendered norms. Data revealed the Madonna/whore dichotomy persists in the understanding of sex work, producing conflicting understandings of self, but this was counterbalanced by respondents who valorised neoliberal ideals of self-responsibility through (sexual) entrepreneurialism. Resisting stigma, digital sex workers adopted a number of strategies to legitimate their work, for instance, paying taxes and ensuring their work was within the legal boundaries, as outlined in Chapter Five. Furthermore, through processes of differentiation, women were keen to frame their stories in relation to what they would not do, stressing the difference between their work and perceived ‘deviant’ sexualities, framing their work and themselves within the boundary of heterosexuality. Drawing from these findings, I argue that stigma does continue to colour all sex work (Weitzer, 2010), and my respondents engaged in navigating stigmatising labels that might produce status loss and discrimination. However, digital transformations and the marketisation of sex and intimacy also complicates the binary on which the ‘Whore stigma’ is based, which can no longer be understood as a ‘simple’ normative distinction between good and bad female sexuality, but that it makes sense differently, depending on the stage of one’s life. Thus, I argue that leading double lives is not complete for many, and it is more complex than this. Rather, I argue that neoliberalism has created another false binary of sexual agent or victim (Gill, 2008; Bay-Cheng, 2015). Respondents to this study presented themselves as empowered sexual agents, but this narrative does not always allow for more problematic aspects of digital sex work to be identified and challenged, such as misogynistic abuse, unwanted sexual attention and the effects of stigma. Instead, what are seen are individualised responses to the negotiation and management of these issues.
The structure of this chapter is as follows: firstly, I explore the motivations to engage in digital sex work presented by respondents, exploring the interplay with gender and sexuality and emphasising the multiple, rather than singular reasons given. Secondly, I advance the argument made in Chapter Two about the normalisation of presenting an online self in the mode of entrepreneur in dating markets (Illouz, 2007; Brown, 2015), relating access to digital sex markets with online dating. The theme of entrepreneurship is continued in the third section that presents the strategies adopted by digital sex workers to make an income in a competitive market. From this emerges a mobility for digital sex workers, between services in and out of sex markets, as a way to manage economic risk; however, unlike other entrepreneurs in late capitalism, who may see their work as self-realising, digital sex workers commit time to managing their privacy, due to the ongoing risk of stigma and find ways to navigate this. The final section explores how digital sex work differs from other forms of entrepreneurialism: in the negotiation and resistance to stigma.

7.2: Gendered dynamics behind digital sex workers’ motivations

Motivations presented by the respondents to engage in digital sex markets as workers were multiple. Unlike the practical motivations primarily adduced by women in this study, those who identified as men and gender-fluid were more likely to describe doing digital sex work to satisfy sexual curiosity, explore their sexual desires and their gender identities than to generate an income. For Joe (aged 27) who was assigned male at birth but identified as gender-fluid, being a webcammer coincided with their journey with gender identity. As Joe (webcamming and escort services) describes, ‘the cam, particularly while I was exploring, it did help me through some difficult times’.

Other researchers have found transgender and gender-fluid people were motivated to gain feelings of acceptance and validation of their sexual and gender identities through sex
work (Vanwesenbeeck, 2013; Matthen et al., 2018). Although, as stated motivations were not singular and Joe also described using the income from digital sex work to save to buy a house in an overpriced housing market.

It is [digital sex work] one part funsies and one part -- The real logic behind it is, you tell me another way to generate a housing deposit in this fucking market. That's the main reason for my decision to go for it. That's actually it, it all boils down to financials. Asserting that, like all work, he was primarily driven by economics.

Similarly, Paul (aged 45) identified as heterosexual to his friends, family and colleagues but had used his role on Adultwork as a way to meet predominately men, and sometimes women. He said that he first engaged in digital sexual labour: ‘to explore things a little bit more, you know, explore my sexuality I guess. You know. This place [Adultwork] has given me the opportunity to do that really’. Both Joe and Paul had full-time professional jobs, which suggests there was not an economic necessity to sell sexual services, yet turned to the market to explore sexual practices and identities. As Paul states:

I would never do it just for the money and like I say I have always been in full time work so I have never even had to consider doing it just for the money. It has never crossed my mind to give up the day job cos I think I could just do this all the time. I think if I did it too much I would get bored with it. You know, think it is, you know. It has been good for the bit of extra money. Bit of pocket money effectively. But at the same time if I didn’t enjoy it I just couldn’t do it. It is a bit of an ego boost. As well. You know people are complementing on the way you look as well sort of thing. I have seen your movies, I have seen your pictures, you are so lucky. It is like it is its own little universe. It is almost like a second life really. Like I said to you my screen name or escort name is Peter and that is almost a different person really to what all my friends and family know as Paul. It is a bizarre. It is like its own universe really.

Paul wishes to assert that he is not economically in need of this work, that the money he earns is not the overriding motivation, just a benefit. He is more motivated by the attention and validation he receives from customers (mainly men) as an attractive and athletic man.

The only participant who described turning to sex work for survival was David (male, aged 19). As the youngest participant and one of only five male sex workers in this study, he had experienced homelessness and ‘was in a really rough time of life’ when he started selling
sex. He said, ‘I had been staying in hostels and stuff like that. It was just an easy way out, really. I’ve done escorting and it pulled me out of a hole, basically’. In many ways David was an anomaly in this study as he had very little experience of selling digitally-mediated sexual services, although he did use platforms to advertise escort services; having ‘done webcam in the past […] it didn’t really pay that much money if I am honest with you’. However, his story reveals the complexity of sex work which includes the very real experiences of absolute economic necessity of survival which are less present in the rest of the sample.

Women in this study also discussed sexual exploration and finding an avenue to satisfy their sexual needs as motivation to start selling direct and digitally-mediated sex services. The oldest participant, Sylvia, first engaged in digital sex work at 56 years of age. As a divorced, retired teacher with her own home, she was motivated, and remained motivated by the sexual excitement and fun the work offered her, as well as the financial benefits - stating:

I bloody liked it from the get go. I have continued to like it. It has never been the meat market I expected. Peoples’ perceptions of it are so not like what it is in reality. There are so many expectations of it [selling sex]. It’s the least like what I expected. Throughout the two interviews, Sylvia found humour in the interactions with clients and seemed to relish the taboo nature of the work, particularly in relation to her age. For Sylvia, the money she earned from her sexual labour was validation of her sexiness: ‘When I saw the money flood in, I couldn’t believe my eyes. It was absolutely fantastic’, and asserts her sexual agency by engaging in digital sex markets, wanting more from life. As she states:

I was looking around. I was feeling good. I was feeling happy. I thought I needed a bigger social life because I was meeting the same people over, and over, and over.

Anita (aged 52), also used digital sex markets to explore her sexual preferences and presented herself as an empowered sexual agent, taking control of her sexual well-being. Anita (a telephone and text sex worker) had been married for over 25 years, surreptitiously talked about how digital sex work was an outlet for her sexuality. In a discussion regarding a customer she stated, ‘if you are in a relationship you are, your sexual preferences are different to your
partners. It must be bloody awful. I had a bit of frustration myself. I have found an outlet now, but if you have no outlet.’ Anita, similarly to the men and gender-fluid sex workers in this study, also used the market as an outlet for sexual expression and exploration, although was also keen to express that money was also partly her motivation as she does it for ‘a bit of money. A bit of fun.’

For Anita and Sylvia, digital sex work gave them an opportunity to explore their sexual desires and activities outside of their personal lives. However, Rachel (aged 30) understood her sexual labour as an extension of a (sexual) lifestyle that was not, as she states, ‘conventional’. Her and her husband since they were teenagers and were ‘swingers’ and ‘sharing partners anyway’ before she decided to start selling direct sex and then later webcam services. Sylvia, Anita and Rachel were the exception in placing their sexuality more at the forefront of their motivations to engage in digital sex markets as workers; however, their accounts were interspersed with economic reasons too.

Both Rachel (engineer) and Sylvia (retired teacher) had race and class privilege, who were white, native born English speakers with university degrees. In addition to the sexual enjoyment they gained from their work, they also described how their income from digital sex markets funded a consumerist lifestyle. As Rachel states:

Basically the problem with being young, unless you’re very privileged, is that’s when you’re basically the poorest. But also that’s when you look the nicest in all of the nice clothes and that’s when you have the time to go out and do stuff, and make memories and things. I guess I used a lot of it for that kind of thing.

Similarly for Sylvia, digital sex work paid for holidays for herself and for her family:

My webcam money pays my expenses. That pays for all my rent and utilities. £100 expenses, £100 pocket money. £100 holiday money. It never works out just like that. I don’t spend £200 per week. So my holiday fund grows very quickly. Extremely quickly.

They were able to narrate a sexual agency that as Rachel states ‘enhanced her lifestyle’.
Previous research on sex workers’ motivation has tended to focus on a specific group of sex workers, e.g. those who are on the streets, and therefore have often concluded that the motivation to sell sex is based on ‘early victimization, homelessness and drug use’ (Vanwesenbeeck, 2001: 261). More recently, the dominant explanation to make sense of women’s participation in the sex industry is economic necessity (Vanwesenbeeck, 2013). The data from this study challenge these findings because, although economics were part of the reasoning, many women in the study did have relative privilege.

Obviously, this privilege is not distributed equally amongst them, but the majority of the women possessed social, economic and cultural capital that they were able to draw upon. Four of the women had degrees. Other female respondents had professional training, e.g. as a hairdresser, an artist and a teaching assistant. Several were home-owners and the majority were white (see Table 3, in Chapter Three for a summary of respondents’ backgrounds). The women who took part in the study did not appear to have no other alternative than to engage in digital sex work, rather they were part of a wider trend of homeworking, small-scale entrepreneurs who work at the margins of the economy (Taylor, 2016). Despite having access to economic, social and cultural capital, in a late capitalist neoliberal economy that produces uncertainties many women in this study used digital sex work as an individualised response to protect themselves from economic risks.

Digital sex work provided a number of women with an opportunity to work during times of ill-health. For example, Sarah (aged 38) described a similar need to find work quickly when she was unable to continue working as a self-employed mobile hairdresser.

It kind of fitted in with me well. I broke my wrist, you see and I couldn’t work. And when I was not working that is when the phone chat thing came about. Something easy to do at home. Doing the phone chat at home was ideal for me. I couldn’t do very much with a broken wrist. I was in a cast for about two months. Even when I had the cast taken off the muscles are still quite weak. I had a lot of pain and discomfort so all in all I wasn’t working for about 4 months.
A ‘flexible’ labour market provides few protections to women who work in ‘non-standard’ ways (Stewart, 2013). In this context, Sarah had to be self-sufficient and enterprising to think of alternative ways to make an income, and digital sex work provided an opportunity to earn money quickly, at home, without any significant start-up costs. Sarah’s experience shows the reduction in welfare support, who as a single mother, had to find alternative ways to support her family. Using digital sex work as a way to manage economic uncertainty is explored in more detail in the following section.

The flexibilisation of labour markets is ambiguous. On the one hand work and income is more unstable and less predictable, yet workers report benefitting from flexible working schedules. Like other platform-managed labour, the digital sex work offered flexibility in terms of self-management of hours, which all respondents benefitted from as it gave them autonomy over their working practices. Respondents enjoyed not having to commit to set working patterns, increasing or decreasing hours as needed and choosing when and where to work. Self-management of hours meant respondents were able to fit their work around other commitments such as another job, caring for a relative or developing a new career. Lucy (‘sext’ worker), for example, benefitted from flexible working conditions in terms of self-managing hours, working from home and returning to work after a sustained break. She returned to sex work in her forties, as a text operator, having previously worked as an escort in her twenties. She was looking for work she could do at home that fitted around her familial commitments and her ill-health. She notes, ‘I was a carer for my sister with MS and now I am a carer for my mum […] I just appreciate I have an income really’. She struggles with anxiety and depression and values this form of work because she is able to do it from home, increasing hours when she feels well enough and when she needs to. She states:

I can log on and log off whenever I want. Yeah, it just gives me a break to, you know. Like I said if I have fallen into depression and stuff – you know – it is hard enough to, you know, if you are low and stuff. The most I can do is do this in bed and still earn
money [...] If I am going somewhere and need more money then I can do more hours. It gives me flexibility and options to earn more.

This is seen in other studies of female entrepreneurs; the enterprising worker is able to manage a number of responsibilities (Luckman, 2015; Ikonen, 2018; Taylor, 2018), benefiting from homeworking so as to manage additional domestic labour.

With the exceptions of Sylvia, Rachel and to some extent Anita, the women in the study generally downplayed their sexual desires and activities whereas the men and the sex worker who identified as gender-fluid were more likely to place sex at the centre of their motivations. By focusing on what was not said in the interview, it might be advanced that explaining their involvement in sex markets as a result of primarily economic reasons could be, for my female respondents, a way of conforming to gender norms. Economic necessity fits more neatly with feminine gendered expectations than acting on sexual desires and finding enjoyment in commercial sexual interactions. Likewise, the men, drew on traditional gender norms to justify their involvement. Economic necessity disturbs constructed ideas of hegemonic masculinity, as it challenges the idea of an economically capable, male breadwinner, whereas sexual promiscuity and sexual prowess fit more neatly into prescribed gendered roles (Hollway, 1984; Connell, 1995; Cornwall, 2010; Vanwesenbeeck, 2013). This has been noted in other sex work research. Colosi (2012) suggests in her study of female strippers that economics is given as a primary reason because they are bound by the common perception that women could only sell sex out of necessity. Conversely, research with male sex workers suggests that men may find it less challenging to their masculine identity if they claim to be doing this work for sexual pleasure rather than for money (Minicheillo et al., 2013; Vanwesenbeeck, 2013).
7.3: Normalisation of marketing sex

Technical devices, such as fast broadband, software to produce and edit online content, and smartphones with quality cameras, as discussed in Chapter Four, meant respondents found accessing digital sex markets ‘easy’ and ‘straightforward’ because creating online identities through profiles on platforms is increasingly normalised and part of the everyday. During the interview with Suzie (aged 25) she described how she discovered Adultwork and the ease and speed of transitioning into commercial sex markets:

I had seen many documentaries on webcamming and offering sexual services etc. and after a while I wanted to know more and how I’d go about it. One evening I found Adultwork and made an account, although I wasn’t planning on starting straight away I was planning on starting the following week or so. But then within about 10 minutes of making my profile I had received a few emails and bookings so I ended up starting that night. It was all very quick.

Others described similar experiences, showing the ease in which technology affords access to digital sex markets:

Before I enrolled I had never heard of Adultwork. I enrolled on it. Created a profile, no pictures or anything. Straight away I got a job from a guy from Leeds who was travelling on business. I took my first job and it went extremely well. And I have been working ever since. It turned out to be good work (Sylvia, escort).

At the time, I didn’t even have my own computer because mine was broken. I had to use my son’s. I invented a profile, I didn’t think about it, I just wrote something there and that was that. Of course, within a day or two I had a job. No pictures, nothing, just some information (Penelope, webcammer).

Penelope’s account shows that even without the personal infrastructure required for digital sex work, there are possible ways to establish a profile quickly and to see economic returns in a short period of time.

As part of the normalisation of presenting oneself in online markets, the data reveals a connection between digital sex markets and online dating. Several respondents described transitioning from online dating to paid digital sex work. Calvin (aged 41), sells erotic massages to men and has begun to sell sex to women via platforms. Below he described how he decided to start charging women to have sex with him:
It is a natural progression to being online dating. And when I am saying online dating I use that word very loosely – online sex let’s put it. Well I mean at the end of the day I am on a couple of sites where it is just pure casual fun and I have decided why not start charging for it. And it works ok at best.

For Calvin, using the Internet to find casual sex had become a normalised part of his lifestyle and marketing his sexual subjectivity online was not transgressive. As he stated, ‘whether it is free or whether to pay. You got to be able to provide a service or something. And that is what I do’. Similarly, Sylvia had signed up to an over 50s dating website and, due to her popularity, realised she could generate an income from marketing her sexual self. Like Calvin, the only difference between the experiences of casual sex and commercial sex was the negotiation of a payment. As Sylvia notes, ‘It [online dating] is basically it is the same as what I do now, but got paid for it’. This suggests the possibility of a permeable boundary between commercial sex and non-commercial sex (Ashford, 2009; MacPhail et al. 2015). Digital communication technologies have altered the understanding of public private. Using online public forums to meet people for private sexual and/or emotional intimacy is commonplace.

The marketisation of intimate relations through Internet dating has been well analysed (Illouz, 2007; Brown, 2015). Online dating has become a mainstream activity for many in the UK (Ellison et al., 2006), making finding an intimate connection a billion pound industry. Online dating is governed by market ideologies of competition, consumption and profit; individuals increasingly approach dating in the ‘mode of entrepreneur’ (Brown, 2015: 31). The self becomes a ‘commodity on public display’ (Illouz, 2007: 79) and individuals present themselves as ‘models or actors’ (Illouz, 2007: 81). They are made to compete with others and are hyperconscious of their physical appearance as their bodies are the main source of social and economic value.

For Calvin, it was a ‘natural progression’ to create profiles in a commercial sex market to generate an income, as it was something he was doing anyway. He had already used the online markets to find sex and intimacy. Here, Joe (escort and webcammer) describes the
commonality of creating online profiles as an everyday occurrence that they have done so many times they are bored by it:

I do know there are other sites like I said I’ve just never been bothered. I hate filling in profiles and generating profiles and at some point, I’ll have the effort to sit down and write one which I’ll then just copy paste through all of them.

Generating online profiles using images to present yourself publically to an ‘abstract and anonymous audience’ (Illouz, 2007: 78) is a mainstream activity for many through sexual market places such as dating apps and social media such as Facebook and Twitter.

This disruption of public private is further seen in the duality of commercial and non-commercial sex on ‘gay’ dating apps (Ashford, 2009; MacPhail et al., 2015). David described how he accessed sex work through dating apps, despite his more vulnerable economic status:

Yes. I’ve been doing the escorting for a whole year. I’ve also sold videos to people. That’s not on any sites. It was just through Whatsapp. I just got their number of this app called Grindr. It’s for gay people. They got my number off there. People just ask you to sell them videos and stuff and they just put the money in your bank account.

David’s story shows the casual and informal nature he and others entered sex markets and how this is aided by communication technologies. Using apps, both mainstream and sex work, to sell sex, was a theme amongst the two men in the study who identified as homosexual. Antonio declared, ‘it is all about the apps. That is where gay men get sex’ and David’s following account shows the informal nature of commercial sexual transactions in the ‘gay community’.

I’ve done [phone sex] before, when it was just like some guys who found me on an app. I just gave them my number and they put twenty quid in my bank. It was just speaking to them about gay stuff. They wanted me to say, “oh you dirty pig” stuff like that. They just put twenty pound in my bank. That was the only time I’ve done that [phone sex].

This reflects the findings from studies of sex work in the gay community that suggest the boundaries between commercial and non-commercial sex are fluid, sharing the same online spaces (Ashford; 2009; Minichiello et al., 2013; MacPhail et al., 2015). Despite this initial ease,
once engaged in a competitive market, digital sex workers had to ‘hustle’ to make their desired income.

7.4: The ‘hustle’: Workers’ strategies to make money in a competitive market

Challenging respondents’ perceived sense of flexible well-paid work, is the ‘on-demand’ nature of digital sex work, thus the income generated is uncertain and unstable, making it difficult for respondents to be precise regarding how much they earned. There were disparities in income amongst respondents because of variation in regard to hours worked, services offered, and prices charged, nevertheless, in comparison to other service work, digital sex work offered a relatively better income, control over working hours and low entry barriers to begin work. It should be noted, as found in other research (Brooks-Gordon et al., 2015), that the men in this study generally charged less and appeared to work less hours, as exemplified in Table 7.1 below, thus grounding the argument that men choose to work in sex markets for sexual exploration, rather than primarily for economic reasons.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Type of work</th>
<th>Part time/dual work/full time</th>
<th>Income per week based on estimations given by respondents (GBP)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anita</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Phone/text</td>
<td>Part time</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Escort/webcam/phone</td>
<td>Full time</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirsty</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Webcam/phone/IM</td>
<td>Full time</td>
<td>750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Text (previously worked as an escort)</td>
<td>Dual work</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megan</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>‘Glamour’ model/webcam</td>
<td>Full time</td>
<td>500 - 800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paula</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Escort/webcam (at the time of interviewing was not doing webcam)</td>
<td>Dual work</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penelope</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Webcam/phone/text</td>
<td>Dual work</td>
<td>500 - 1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Escort/webcam</td>
<td>Dual work</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhona</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Phone/text previously worked as an escort</td>
<td>Dual work</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Escort/webcam/phone/text</td>
<td>Dual work</td>
<td>1,000 - 1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suzie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Webcam/phone</td>
<td>Full time</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sylvia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>Escort/webcam/phone/text</td>
<td>Part time, other income</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>Gender-Fluid</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Escort/webcam</td>
<td>Dual work</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antonio</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Various positions in the sex industry including escorting, porn acting and webcamming</td>
<td>Dual work</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brett</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Escort/webcam</td>
<td>Dual work</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calvin</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Erotic masseur/webcam/phone/escort</td>
<td>Dual work</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Escort/webcam (predominately escorting)</td>
<td>Full time</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Escort/webcam/phone</td>
<td>Dual work</td>
<td>Sporadic income: 160 per visit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Escort/webcam/phone</td>
<td>Dual work</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Despite the valorisation of flexibility through the control over their hours, many respondents discussed having to ‘hustle’ to make the income they required from the job. Kirsty (aged 23), a full-time digital sex worker, reflected on the uncertainty of the income: ‘obviously each month it is different, but it is always over 3K’. Megan (aged 23) reports earning similar amounts, setting herself a weekly financial target to avoid the uncertainty of income. She ‘hustles’ to make sure she reaches her target income by putting on extra webcam shows, making and selling videos, advertising on different platforms, and selling photographs and goods. She explains:

Say I was having a slow week I can pick up something elsewhere. For example I can take a shoot even if it is less money, but it makes up the money that week. Or I can find something really niche and saying I am doing this show.

As discussed in the previous chapter, digital sex markets are highly competitive and thus demand an enterprising dynamic worker. Consequently, it was not uncommon amongst respondents to expand and diversify services, as well as advertising their services across numerous mainstream and adult platforms. The interplay of technologies and social relations has produced a ‘hybrid sex worker’ who is not fixed by location, legitimacy or legality but rather demonstrates a fluidity between online/offline services, free and paid labour, and increasing access to a ‘private’ self, creating a portfolio of work to generate an income. Technology enables sex workers to diversify their goods and services, to operate across sex work modalities and creatively generate a customer base through social media. Like the labour market more generally, the ‘work is production’ (Pettinger, 2019: 78).

Portfolio working was common amongst respondents, as the majority offered more than one service (see Table 3.3 and 3.4 in Chapter Three), most commonly through Adultwork’s integrated platform that ‘networks’ or connects ‘members’ through email, instant messenger, discussion groups, blogs, a marketplace, digital images and videos. Furthermore, several respondents sold products on Adultwork’s marketplace, including digitally downloadable films and photographs and tangible goods such as underwear. For instance, Anita had worked
exclusively on Adultwork for two years as a phone and text sex worker. She decided to expand her portfolio and began selling goods on its marketplace. She explains:

I sell underwear, knickers, cos I wasn’t getting that many calls. Some days I was getting 5 calls and other days I don’t get any calls. Some days I might not get nothing at all so just to try and implement, make sure I am covering my costs basically. I started selling things, cos you have to pay [to advertise on Adultwork] (Anita, portfolio sex worker).

In the digital age, the ‘new normal’ of working life is characterised by generating work through initiative and innovation (Taylor and Luckman, 2018). Despite the ‘hustle’ of diversifying her services and selling goods, her income remained relatively low. She sometimes struggled to make any money, or could be more successful and earn £100 in a week. She states: ‘Yesterday I made about £20, and I have to pay £6 to be on that [Adultwork]. I didn’t think I was even going to get that, but then someone looked at my movie’. Like others working on Adultwork, her income was unpredictable and highly unstable, and she was constantly required to be innovative and creative. For Anita, the motivation to engage in digital sex work was not only economic, as she viewed the work as ‘a hobby’ that gave her sexual realisation.

As part of creating a portfolio of work, the research has found that uploading unpaid content to platforms is embedded in the experience of digital sex workers to further generate an income and was generally undervalued by respondents. Performing unpaid labour is not unique to sex markets as it is a ‘striking feature’ of labour managed by platforms (Webster and Randle, 2016: 7). The impact of so-called ‘web 2.0’ and associated technologies means individuals can relatively straightforwardly produce digital content, uploading blogs, films, microblogs, photographs and reviews. For instance, Sylvia, (aged 60) initially started selling direct services, and had since expanded her portfolio to include webcamming and phone sex. She also began uploading unpaid digital content in the form of blogs and photographs: ‘As far as I am concerned it’s fantastic. I’m enjoying putting up photos, writing blog posts. So I like it very much’. Sylvia’s labour is ‘simultaneously voluntarily given and unwaged, enjoyed and
exploited” (Terranova, 2000, p. 37). She enjoys the attention her blogs receive and uses time in-between clients to update her Adultwork profile. She maximises her time to generate more interest in her profile, therefore, potentially generating more income. As discussed, she finds pleasure in this aspect of her work, which does not appear to represent ‘work’ to her, despite being intrinsically linked to generating an income. For Sylvia, blogging is part of being a successful digital sex worker because it is a way of creating intimacy and sociability with her (potential) customers, presenting an authentic self. She remarked, ‘I've got some people who follow me because of the blog, they read my blog. I have messages “when will you blog next”. People log on to read my blog… people like me as a personality’. Like other digital entrepreneurs, blogging as a telling of intimate lives and personal narratives has become a way of creating networks and income.

Developing a portfolio of work was not limited to Adultwork, but is seen in the marketisation of access to social media accounts. As a hybrid sex worker, Kirsty was enterprising, developing a portfolio of online sexual services and goods. She performed webcam shows and sold downloadable ‘adult movies’ across a number of different platforms. On Adultwork she offered text, phone, IM, and webcam services and also sold goods. Megan and Kirsty, both full-time digital sex workers in their early twenties, also sold access to their social media accounts such as Instagram, and messenger services such as WhatsApp and Kik Messenger. As Kirsty states:

Guys will pay to have my phone number. Like WhatsApp and Kik Messenger and all them kind of things. They will pay for Snapchat and then you just give the username so it is pretty much easy work. So you just have their usernames and then you don’t have to speak to them (Kirsty, portfolio digital sex worker).

In this instance, for a one off fee, customers have an ongoing, ‘personal’ interaction. Yet paradoxically from Kirsty’s perspective, she finds this digital connection less personal and demanding as she ‘don’t have to speak to them’. This reflects the personalisation of work, as discussed by Taylor and Luckman (2018), areas of work that were once separate to work life
become monetised. Yet contradictorily Kirsty also recognises that she gives a lot of herself, making herself always available to customers:

> My phone does not stop I get customers texting me all the time. I don’t like to I just feel like. I have no time for social media. I use to enjoy going on Facebook, but I’ve got no time for it. My life has been taken over by work.

Digital communication technologies have disrupted conventional understandings of time and space so workers in the digital age are always available and work can take place anywhere, anytime. Melissa Gregg describes this as ‘presence bleed’ (2011: 3), where there are no longer firm boundaries between personal and professional identities. There is a ‘consciousness of the always-present potential for engaging with work’ (2011: 3).

These accounts suggest that digital sex workers use their agency to expand their portfolio and increase their hours to make more money, but their choice is limited, particularly for those who approach digital sex work as a profession. They commit a large amount of time, use a separate dedicated space and expect to receive an income from it (Taylor, 2018). They present their work as fun; for instance, Sylvia’s blogging is unpaid and Kirsty’s access to social media accounts was described as ‘easy money’. In order to make the desired income, digital sex workers epitomise the idealised entrepreneur who is understood to be optimistic, self-managing and innovative (Luckman, 2015; Taylor, 2018), yet in reality they work hard to manage the uncertainty of the income, constantly looking for new ways to attract customers and develop their place in the market. Sanders et al.’s (2016) job satisfaction survey with 240 sex workers who use the Internet to advertise services as well as mediate services found high levels of control over how to present themselves, refuse clients and working hours and setting prices. Similarly, in this study, digital sex workers reported autonomy over their working lives; however, I complicate their responses of ‘being in control’. That is not to argue that they have ‘false consciousness’, which has been argued when sex workers express their freedom within sex markets (e.g. Farley, 2006), but rather other market devices also impact on the agency of
digital sex workers’ working lives. In a competitive market, digital sex workers have to put in many unpaid hours which they appear to undervalue, to generate an income, which, in turn, profits sex work platforms. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter Four, the prices set by sex workers are a result of a number of market devices: value judgements, market prices and technical devices.

For some digital sex workers in this study, presenting their work as ‘fun’ fits with wider discourses that are reframing what is understood as work. It is argued that the distinction between work and leisure is eroding and increasingly people claim to be ‘doing what they love’ (Gill and Pratt, 2008; Pettinger, 2015). As noted in the introduction, reasons for engaging in digital sex markets as workers were multiple, and at times conflicting. For instance, Rachel (aged 30) describes how the economic crash of 2008 left her and her husband short of money, despite them both working full-time professional jobs: ‘We were already swingers and then it was the credit crunch and there was a drop in earning and I suggested to my husband we could make money escorting’. Her comments here suggest that she started sex work for economic reasons, but in the second interview, she asserts, ‘I'm not one of those people, because I'm only doing it for fun’, rather than for money. Her claim that the work is ‘fun’ was used by some of the digital sex workers as a way to differentiate themselves from sex workers who have to engage in sexual labour. As Bernstein (2007b) argues – drawing on Bourdieu’s concept of distinction – ‘fun’ has become a work ethic that the middle classes aspire to, so as to differentiate themselves from the working classes, as there is stigma in poverty and economic necessity.

This suggests that there are different layers of stigma, and that stigma attached to being a ‘sexual’ women who sells sex, may be less pressing for individuals than stigma associated with poverty. For instance, Fiona identified as middle class, but from the information she provided, such as leaving school at 15 and living in social housing, I suggest she misidentifies
her class status. In the following statement, she describes the stigma of poverty and the shame of having to rely on the state.

It was money, it was money. I was left in the shit. I didn’t want to go and sign on down the job centre. That was one thing I didn’t want to do. You know. You got no money and you have got kids to look after and you have got council tax to pay. I just don’t want to be associated with them so erm, so I just started doing this as a job to look after me and, and I have looked after it, and it is all right.

Research suggests that the stigma associated with poverty has grown since the economic crash of 2008 and the ensuing coalition government’s austerity measures (Baumberg, 2015; Pemberton et al., 2016). Alongside this increasing stigma towards those who require welfare support is the valorisation of entrepreneurship and a political agenda to shame those who do not work, developing the concept of worklessness as those who could work but ‘choose’ not to (see Department of Work and Pensions, 2010). The individualism of poverty is seen in Kirsty’s reasons for being a sexual entrepreneur.

A lot of people in the UK rely on benefits and I’ve not, I have been out of jobs, but I have never done that. I have always thought there is always an alternative to rely on other people… I don’t want to rely on other people. You know. For my happiness I just think if I have money in the bank I will be all right.

She uses her sexual entrepreneurship to leave poverty as far away as possible. I describe Kirsty as working class, as she also left school at 15 without qualifications. She has had several (feminised) jobs, such as retail work, administrative work and care work, but felt she had to work very long hours for little economic reward. Like Fiona, she is willing to risk sexual stigma so as not to experience the stigma associated with poverty and ‘worklessness’ (Department of Work and Pensions, 2010: 2).

7.5: Managing economic risks through digital sex work

Driven by the neoliberal ideology of self-responsibilisation and aided by the ease of accessing digital sex markets through communication technologies, the data shows there is mobility for
sex workers, movement between services, and fluidity in and out of sex markets. Rhona (aged 27) showed fluidity in her experience as a sex worker. She had been escorting for more than ten years but had recently decided she wanted to explore other work options; rather than ‘exit’ sex markets, she continued to offer erotic phone and text services on Adultwork. Penelope (aged 52) had previous experience as a telephone sex worker and Antonio (aged 45) had worked in sex markets at different moments in his life as a performer in pornography, and offering escort and webcamming services. These accounts are in contrast to a one-off ‘exit’ from sex markets, an assumption dominant in the regulation of sex work (Scoular and O’Neill, 2007; Sanders, 2007). Digital technologies enable individuals to engage with sex markets periodically, move easily between markets and form part of long-term strategies to ensure economic security.

At the individual level, digitally-mediated forms of sex work were often perceived by respondents to not have the same risks associated with other forms of sex work, with regard to personal safety, criminality and physically hard work. As discussed in the literature on direct forms of sex work, sex workers can experience ‘burnout’ due to the stigma and the physicality of the work (Vanwesenbeeck, 2013). This is reflected in Sarah’s statement comparing the risks of direct and digitally-mediated sex work.

With the webcamming there is nothing physical about it at all, is there. I think with the escorting if you do it for too long you know and the safety thing. I think as you get older I don’t think I could be bothered to do it [escorting] as much. But the webcamming is just me sitting in my bedroom to people which is easy.

Sarah also acknowledges that the risks of physical harm are reduced. As Rachel states: ‘I mean they can steal your details, if you end up in a situation unlucky enough, but physically you cannot be murdered and catch STDs’. Due to the sense of increased physical safety, several respondents had re-entered sex markets since the platformisation of sex work.

Several interviewees described how they could adapt and change services in the future, to ‘less intrusive’ (Lucy, aged 43) services if life required them to do so. As Sarah (aged 38) notes,
I don’t see the escorting going on forever. I think you get too old, too burnt out, too jaded, too fed up with it. But with the webcamming and phone work, just because it is so convenient. I have no outgoings, I can do it when I want to do it. I am in control. I am my own boss. I can do it as long as I like.

This was mirrored by other respondents who also saw digital sex work as an insurance against economic uncertainty and something she can rely on for most of her adult life. As Megan states:

I always said I would do it until it got to stressful or I couldn’t do it. I would, one day, like to use my degree cos I worked hard for my degree. But the cam thing, it is so easy. You could be 30, 40, 45 and be like I need extra cash and go on. How many people have this mindset? Like my mum wouldn’t do it. But, say I needed a holiday, I would go back and do it (Megan, aged 23).

I’ll remain in Adultwork for as long as I can. I currently don’t have any ‘overall’ goals, my main goal in life is to not have to struggle and Adultwork helps with that (Suzie, aged 23).

The accounts described form part of a wider trend ‘of the privatisation of responsibility for a worker’s economic position’ (Taylor and Luckman, 2018: 7), that is finding new ways, often through opportunities provided by digital communication technologies, to manage economic uncertainties, so as not to ‘struggle’ and to move as far away from poverty as possible.

At the macro level, the valorisation of entrepreneurialism and self-responsibilisation can be seen in the narratives of women in this study who adopted a neoliberal morality of self-management. As a result, they took individual responsibility for economic risks and drew on sex markets as a way to manage uncertainties. Fiona’s (escort, webcamming and phone worker) story shows how the micro and macro processes work in conjunction in regard to aiding movement out and then back into sex work. Fiona described the stark difference between her early experience as a street-based sex worker and her current experience selling escorting, webcam and phone services via Adultwork. Fiona described ‘having been through it’ as a child, suggesting it had been a difficult childhood. She was in care from age 11 and was pregnant at age 14. When she was 17 she was living in a ‘mum and baby unit, a bit like a hostel’ and that is when she was drawn into street sex work. She described ‘being pimped… earning money to hand it over’, as well as being ‘grabbed’ (in the interview, Fiona did not expand, but as I
understand it, she was assaulted by a stranger). She indicated that the five months of street-based sex work was underpinned by coercion and force. Research on street-based sex work demonstrates that this level of violence and vulnerability is endemic (Scoular and O’Neill, 2007).

This is distinctly different to how she described the experience of selling escorting services, webcam and phone service via Adultwork, as a mother of three in her early 40s: ‘This is mine. I choose, I choose what happens’, asserting her sexual agency. Remarkably, Fiona used her ‘troubled’ adolescence to establish a career working with young people in various roles, including managing a mother and baby unit, being a teaching assistant and sitting on the board of the local authority’s child services. However, five years prior to the interview, she ‘was left in the shit’ after walking out on her job due to frustrations regarding her employers. Her motivation to re-enter the sex industry was based on economic security grounded by a desire to be self-responsible, rather than reliant on the state, as previously discussed.

As Ong (2006) argues, in a neoliberal context, there is an acceptance that the welfare state will no longer necessarily support the individual, and that it is moral to be self-responsible. There has been a shift from welfare dependency to being enterprising. Within this context, the agency Fiona asserted reflects the wider experiences of many of the interviewees who describe choice and agency in their considerations of when and how they would use sex work in their future lives. The option to re-enter sex markets as a provider is in line with what Gill (2008) describes as a neoliberal subjectivity based on self-responsibilisation, control over life biographies, and autonomy from the state. For Fiona, her morality was based on being self-governing rather than concerns regarding sexual morality. The risk of ‘poverty’ stigma was stronger than the stigma associated with selling sex.
Nevertheless, some respondents adopted the ‘ought to’ narrative in regard to leaving the sex industry and gaining a ‘normal’ job. Despite being ‘out’ as sex workers, the younger respondents did adopt the ‘ought to’ narrative, reflecting the dominant narrative that sex work is a form of labour that should be avoided if there are alternatives. Megan, (‘glamour model’ and webcammer) stated people often asked when she was going to get a ‘real’ job, and in the interview she justified why she does not have a ‘real’ job and there was a desire, and a concern at her failed attempt to use her degree. Likewise, Kirsty (webcam, phone and text worker) referred to getting a ‘normal’ job and having a ‘normal’ life throughout the interview. However, for both Kirsty and Megan, the income they were earning, in relation to the hours they worked, was too desirable to turn down. Like other respondents, she praises the choice and agency she practices in regard to flexible working conditions: hours, income, and location:

I couldn’t imagine going back to a normal job. [It] would feel strange. I think it is because you are your own boss. Everything. You can be in control of your own income. You can control when you work, where you work, just nice.

In both cases, it was not so much their own unease, but one they felt they ought to have because of other people’s views, reflecting the enduring dominant perception of sex work as a ‘deviant’ occupation.

7.5.1: Distancing from deviant sexuality

Those in this study were confident that the work they did was legal, often asserting that they do ‘nothing wrong’ (Lucy, webcammer), despite being aware that the dominant cultural understanding often links ‘crime, drugs and prostitution. In some peoples’ mind it is all the same thing’ (Paula, escort, and webcammer). As discussed in Chapter Five, the formal laws and regulations regarding digital sex markets mean digital sex workers operate in a regulatory framework that does not criminalise digitally-mediated sex work, but as part of a larger state
project to manage and control sexuality, digital sex work is subject to restrictions, such as the ‘extreme pornography’ and laws regarding minors.

Other respondents engaged in activism to legalise all forms of sex work, thereby recognising the legal distinctions between digitally-mediated sex work and street-based sex work:

I lobby as I write a lot of letters and sign petitions to get it legalised. People out on the street are having a really, really bad time. Easy pickings for the worse kind of men. It’s dangerous and they deserve to be on an equal footing with other workers (Anita, phone and text worker).

Consciously aware of the shadow of criminality over the area in which they worked, it is of note that more than half of the women were compelled to include stories of how they rejected pedophilic requests from customers.

Culturally and legally, sex with minors is considered the most deviant of all sexual desires (Rubin, 1984; Plummer, 1995). It is illegal to pursue sexual fantasies regarding children in England and Wales under a number of acts such as the Obscene Publication Act (1959) and the ‘extreme pornography’ Act (section 63 of the Criminal and Justice Act 2008). Digital sex workers employed the logic of differentiation by distancing themselves from what is commonly considered the most ‘deviant’ of sexualities. This resonates with Mary Douglas’ (2003 [1966]) work on polluting behaviour and persons: I suggest the women in the study were keen to describe limits to their services and to distance themselves, their work and the platform, from ‘a polluting person’ who has ‘developed some wrong condition or simply crossed the line which should not have been crossed and this displacement unleashes danger for someone’ (Douglas, 2003[1966]: 133).

In these accounts of differentiation, it became clear that digital sex workers rely on platforms to manage challenging encounters with customers, with the platforms taking up the role of safeguarding. As discussed in Chapter Five, the informal regulatory space is taken up by platforms to govern the content of the platform. The following extracts show how digital sex
workers turn to *Adultwork* because it ‘is very supportive’ (Rhona, text and phone worker), before considering involving the police in such encounters with customers.

As Megan describes:

Well a man sent an email. “I want you to be a 12-year-old friend of my 12-year-old daughter”. The whole thing is really detailed as well. This is way too detailed. My friend said instantly report it. You show it to *Adultwork*.

Similarly, Sylvia felt supported by *Adultwork* when she reported a pedophilic request to both *Adultwork* and the police.

Sylvia: Well he downloaded private pictures of children. The one that sticks out in my head, that turns my stomach, there was a little girl, under 10, maybe 10 maximum. She had something in her hand and it was in her mouth. I couldn’t comprehend what I was seeing. Is it microphone for karaoke or a lollypop but when I looked it was a penis. Bloody hell! Then he said something about do I have any daughters or friends’ daughters that I can take pictures of. I said no chance and ended the call. There was something about him that reminded me of a call I had had previously through *Adultwork*. So I contacted *Adultwork* and they banned him. And they did. But it reminded me of another phone call I had had asking me about friends’ daughters. So anyway I pondered and pondered now. I didn’t know what to do. I didn’t really want to go to the police because I would need to explain what I do. In the end I did. I couldn’t live with it. They came round straight away. They gave me no bother at all. They were really, really grateful to me. *Adultwork* was really helpful, and gave all the details of this bloke. I still don’t know if it was the same one as before. They got him anyway. The police have phoned me and said they have made an arrest. It is going to take months and months cos they have to go through all his stuff, cos they are hoping it will lead to more and more perpetrators. I’ll be exhibit one in the court case when it happens. Make a statement and everything.

Helen: Are you comfortable with that?

Sylvia: Yep yep. Thing is come hell or high water I’ve gone and done it now. I have to live with it cos at the end of the day that man wasn’t accepting what I was doing. My name will be all over the bloody papers. Hopefully there will be many, many other things they will accuse him of and my name will disappear off the bloody charge.

Sylvia’s account shows she is more confident dealing with platforms than she is with the police because of the shadow of criminality in which digital sex work operates, and nervous to state what she does for a living. However, this was unfounded and the police gave her ‘no bother at all about the work I do’. This reflects findings in other studies that have shown (digital) sex workers are reluctant to engage with the police despite the legality of their work (Campbell et
al., 2018; Sanders et al., 2018b). Furthermore, despite Sylvia’s careful management of ‘discrediting information’ (Goffman, 1963: 58), she is willing to risk disclosure for what she perceives is the right thing to do.

7.5.2: Economic inclusion

In two notable ways the respondents demonstrated that they were not economically marginalised through their work. As discussed, the work was relatively well paid in comparison to other forms of service work, and digital sex work was used as a way to avoid economic marginalisation. Furthermore, as raised in Chapter Four and Six, many of the respondents discussed paying tax on their income. In part, this is linked to the technical market device that has created a fiscal record of digitally-mediated sex work. The following comment from Sylvia suggests that she pays taxes only on the work that is traceable:

“I don’t declare anything I earn that is cash-in-hand [from direct sex work]. I only declare what I make online cos I am paid by cheque from Adultwork each month.”

Aware of the electronic record of her income, she paid taxes on what is part of the formal economy. Although her children did not know what she did for a living, one of them worked for the treasury, and she was keen that, if she was found out, that her work would be legitimated by paying taxes:

“I'm always afraid of being found out. It’s never happened to me but there’s always a possibility and because I’m getting regular cheques from Adultwork. I worry, “I am gonna get caught, I am going to get caught”. So employed an accountant and now I am officially registered as a sole trader and I pay taxes. My flat [which she rents for sex work] and all the utilities are included as ‘allowable expenses’. This means I pay significantly less tax than I would otherwise. So if I get caught, at least my sons won’t be in any trouble.

She is concerned about ‘being found out’ and offsets the risk of social exclusion and status loss, by ensuring her work is legitimate through taxation. Several other respondents (Kirsty, Penelope, Jason, Rachel and Lucy) were keen to confirm they paid taxes, as a way to give recognition to their labour, albeit with limitations. Rachel notes, ‘I pay tax. I have everything
covered. I can be immoral but not illegal.’ Like Sylvia, Rachel is aware of the dominant cultural attitudes towards sex work, but seeks to limit the social risks through taxation and therefore economic inclusion. Jason similarly asserts that paying taxes is ‘the right thing to do’, aware of the stigmatising label that may be applied to himself and his wife, Fiona, as sex workers. The respondents are challenging the oversimplified label of being ‘bad’ for being a sex worker (Rubin, 1984). They are asserting their moral compass as tax-paying citizens which reinforces the legitimacy of their work. In addition, as it has already been noted, many of the digital sex workers discussed here had alternative incomes and therefore were not paying taxes to ensure they had a tax record, thus enabling property renting or mortgages, for instance. They paid taxes because the technical architecture urged them to and as a way to legitimate their work and challenge stigmatising labels.

It is not unusual for sex workers to record their income under another occupation when filing taxes (Brooks-Gordon et al., 2015), as Jason explains: ‘we don’t put it through as a sex worker, we put it through as a cleaning business’. Jason’s statement reflects the liminal position digital sex work locates. On the one hand, the platformisation of sex work has formalised the labour so it can be traced and taxed. On the other hand, Jason continued to be excluded from the formal labour market – despite paying taxes – as he denied his involvement in the sex industry. As Isabel Crowhurst (2019) argues, the moral politics behind the regulation of commercial sex more generally, is also seen in the fiscal policies regarding taxation and sex work, thus resulting in an avoidance of clear and precise rules and laws. By doing this, she argues that sex workers do not benefit from the full membership ascribed to those who are able to declare their occupation without fear of social and/or legal repercussions. The UK government benefits from taxing sex work and, as of 2014, have included sex work as part of the national GDP, which further highlights the economic mainstreaming of sex work, but yet fails to protect sex workers from social harms such as discrimination and exclusion.
7.6: Endemic online misogynistic abuse

The active empowered sexual entrepreneur, as described, is contradicted in the accounts of female digital sex workers who presented gendered and sexual harassment with a troubling normalisation of misogynistic abuse. As Megan states: ‘some guys just like to do it’. Similarly, Suzie, a female webcam and phone sex worker states: ‘some clients like to belittle the workers, as it gives them a kick sexually’. There was an insistence that they remained in control, because they were receiving a payment even if being abused. As Rachel states, ‘People say nasty stuff to you. Really mean, but they are paying you’. Megan, who does not offer escorting services, describes being verbally abused when asked if she will meet up for sex:

A lot of people come on just to ask if you escort. If someone does that I will even take five minutes saying no, cos I am like, well if they are like will you meet me here for £100. I am like... you know, no I have never done it before. If they are rude at the end cos I say no, well I am like you just paid five minutes for that… I mean how badly can someone insult you if they are paying to insult you.

Megan draws on her entrepreneurialism to show that she cannot be a victim in this situation, using the market exchange as a justification for the abuse, suggesting that if there is payment, customers are entitled to abuse her. Bay-Cheng (2015) argues, in her analysis of young women’s’ sexuality in neoliberalism, that women are constructed as either victims or agents and therefore it can be hard to admit gendered and/or sexual abuse and exploitation without destabilising the understanding of self as a sexual agent, always in control.

Megan describes being called ‘fat’ by one customer. Fat is a particularly gendered term and used to control women because the desired feminine body is slim, in control and measured, whereas the fat woman is seen as repulsive and out of control and in need of disciplining (Bartky, 1990). In this instance, it does, to some extent, control Megan. She describes how she would like to respond, but actually stays quiet. ‘Somebody just called me fat. Who are you? You are still paying to call me fat. Good for you. At the end of the day who is the numpty here.
The fatty or the one who is paying for it’. She is angered and ‘would really like to argue back’ but arguing back is not part of her ‘appropriately commodified sexual subjectivity’ (Schraff and Gill, 2011: 60), therefore, she deploys emotional labour work to manage her response, carefully ensuring the customer is not offended and maintaining her agency, because he has paid her.

Misogynistic abuse is so prolific across online spaces, it has become part of the ‘normal’ online environment (Jane, 2016), and therefore not unique to digital sex markets. Specific regulation to protect women from online abuse is more urgent than the call to ban all sex for sale in public places, including the Internet, as discussed in Chapter Five. The argument proposed by Laina Bay-Cheng (2015) goes some way to makes sense of the proliferation of gendered and sexual harassment online. Neoliberalism demands agents or victims, rather than being empowering, it neutralises women’s responses to abuse. By not wishing to appear a victim, digital sex workers in this study neutralise abusive behaviour through the rhetoric of the market.

7.7: Navigating ‘stigma’: maintaining normative gender roles and sexual identities

This section focusses on stigma and its negotiation in relation to personal relationships, which reveals boundaries and stigma in a different way than has been presented so far. Digital sex workers challenge the whore stigma through their multiple identities, as sex workers, mothers, partners, and in their roles in other work, such as hairdressers, carers, researchers and teachers. For the mothers in the study, however, it was essential to keep their work from their children, albeit their children were grown up and no longer living at home. For Penelope, even though she used webcamming as a source of income to support her son through university so he would not get into debt, she states: ‘it would be completely incompatible for him to have a mother who is involved in the sex industry’. Penelope is concerned about the status loss she may experience as a mother in the eyes of her son. Similarly, Anita has daughters that are no longer
living at home, but they ‘would be mortified’ if they found out what she was doing. For both of these mothers, the risk of disapproval, rejection and status loss as a mother is not something they are willing to risk.

Rachel, who had recently become a mother, described concerns that her children would experience courtesy stigma, stigma by association with someone with discrediting attributes, based on her work (Goffman, 1963: 31), as she asserts:

I’m not willing to take the same risks now I have a baby. I wouldn’t want her to be tarred with the same brush. Imagine if I was murdered and people asked her how I was murdered and she had to say whilst she was escorting, I wouldn’t want that.

The construction of ‘whore’ is framed by the counter identity of motherhood, intrinsic to the control of female sexuality (Pheterson, 1996). Even for those respondents, such as Kirsty, who were ‘out’ as a digital sex worker to friends and family, her imagined maternal identity was in conflict with her sex worker identity:

If I wanted to start a family and have children. Just don’t think it will be very suitable. I don’t think it would be a problem if they weren’t there, but a lot of people would disagree with me, so, I would have to stop and get a normal job.

Kirsty’s insight shows the power of stigma. Although she can bring together these two seemingly divergent identities together, she is concerned with the label others may attach to her.

Link and Phelan (2001) argue that the full execution of stigma that results in disapproval, rejection, exclusion and discrimination, requires power. A more dominant group must have power over the ‘stigmatized group’ (2001: 380). Fiona was visited by social services after they were made aware of her sex work:

I had to go into the high school, with teachers and social workers and people in education. My kids don’t know what I do, but it is my choice to tell them. It didn’t scare me in the slightest. They had no right to look down their noses at me. They came round to check there was food in the cupboard and the kids were being cared for. So, what could they do?
She appears confident in the legality of her work, and as her role as a mother, but the state does have power to act on stigmatising labels that could deem her as an ‘inappropriate’ mother, and remove her children from her care. Link and Phelan ask: ‘Do the people who might confer stigma have the power to ensure that the culture recognizes and deeply accepts the stereotypes they connect to the labelled differences?’ (2001: 377). I make the case, that the whore/Madonna binary has certainly not disappeared but it makes senses differently, sometimes more poignantly and sometimes more tenuously, depending on what ‘area’ of one’s life the respondents are discussing. Motherhood remains a ‘bastion’ of good and bad womanhood, whereas female sexuality is more fluid and virginity is no longer expected in ‘respectable’ forms of female sexuality.

Constructing an ‘appropriate’ femininity is not only linked to motherhood, but is also bound up with appropriate forms of female sexuality that, as argued in Chapter Two, are presumed to be white, middle class and heterosexual (Tasker and Negra, 2007; Flood and Gill, forthcoming, quoted in Banet-Weiser et al., 2019). As sexual entrepreneurs who embodied ‘appropriate’ forms of female sexuality, many women in this study were able to navigate stigma through their own cultural, economic, symbolic and social capital. For instance, Megan embodies the ideal feminine beauty depicted in contemporary advertising – white, young, able-bodied and slim (Gill, 2009). She was the highest earner amongst my respondents and inhabits what can be called ‘micro-celebrity’ status (Jerslev, 2016; Khamis et al., 2017). ‘Anyone’ can be a celebrity, a phenomenon that took hold in the 1990s with reality television shows, and has expanded and enhanced with the emergence of web 2.0 and associated technologies (Khamis et al., 2017). It is the intersection of communication technologies and neoliberal individualism that has popularised self-branding and given rise to the micro-celebrity (Khamis et al., 2017). Megan’s online identity formed the basis of her self-branding and she featured on more platforms than any other worker in the sample. These included webcamming platforms
specifically for those who had published photographs as glamour models, as well as more generic platforms like Adultwork (see Appendix 1). She also promoted herself across mainstream social media platforms, such as Twitter and Instagram, and had over 14,000 followers on Instagram (as of 8 February 2019) and sold access to her Twitter account. In the following extract she describes her ‘celebrity’ status amongst clients:

That’s the thing for the glamour models. They [clients] are like “O my god! You did this and I brought this magazine.” And stuff like that. They are quite… I saw this guy the other day and he was like – “you are really famous. I can’t believe I got a famous person.” I am not very famous. So I joked about it with my friends outside: “Hey guys I’m so famous”.

Megan exemplifies a ‘sexual entrepreneurship’ (Harvey and Gill, 2011: 52), selling her ‘appropriately commodified sexual subjectivity’ (Harvey and Gill, 2011: 60). She embodied the legitimate, healthy ordered sex worker who earns an income from her appropriate forms of sexual subjectivity (Scott, 2011). She is not resisting classist and racist notions around sexuality, such as irresponsibility and hypersexualisation (Brooks, 2010; Bay-Cheng, 2015), but rather she can embody the ideal neoliberal agent who is rational, unapologetically ‘sexy’, ambitious and autonomous. She is, however, constantly self-regulating and engaging in impression management to remain within the boundary of ‘appropriate expressions of sexuality’ (Carline, 2011: 312) and not show signs of irresponsibility.

Although she stated she would do ‘anything’ to increase her income, contradictorily she described in detail the boundaries she put on the marketisation of her sexual self. She stated: ‘I don’t want to escort. Full on. I just couldn’t turn up somewhere and have the most horrible person’. Later on she described other boundaries she has set through the logic of differentiation:

I would always ask my mum – when I first started – what would you think if you did fully nude modelling. “You can do it for playboy. If playboy asked you to do fully nude then ok” and I asked her if I was a stripper she said “No”. “If I see you in a newspaper I can say Megan has done this to my work colleagues but if somebody saw you at the strip club working, I wouldn’t be pleased to say: That’s my Megan”.
The Playboy brand legitimises and authenticates nudity, due to the celebrity status it might grant Megan, while stripping is considered lower status. In the context of micro-celebrity, that has been accelerated and exaggerated by digital communication technologies that promote ‘self-branding’, sexual labour can become an avenue to this and forms part of a wider desire to attract ‘followers’ and ‘fans’.

Megan and Kirsty did not lead double lives, as did some of the sex workers Sanders (2005) and Guidroz and Rich (2010) interviewed, but rather presented a single self with no separations between sex work and other aspects of their lives. As young, able-bodied, white, heterosexual, cis-women they had relative privilege that is not always available to sex workers. Furthermore, they both made clear distinctions between the digitally-mediated sex work they engaged in, and direct sex work, understanding this as a line they did not want to cross, thus remaining ‘respectable’ in their decisions to be involved in sex work. This is seen in how Kirsty describes her work in relation to her previous boyfriend:

If he didn’t like it I would have told him to do one. At the end of the day it wasn’t like I was going and meeting people. I think it would have been much different if I was going and meeting people. I don’t think he would like that.

This differentiation between direct sex work and digitally-mediated sex work was also seen by older female respondents, Anita and Penelope, who were in long-term partnerships and were open with their partners about their work, in part because they felt, like the customers in the previous chapter, digitally-mediated sex was not as ‘immoral’. For instance, Anita (married, with two grown up children) is open with her husband about her engagement in sex markets but explains that her husband ‘can dismiss phone chat’ but does not view direct sexual contact with another person as compatible with their relationship. Sarah, (divorced, one child still living at home), who had recently started dating, maintained the differentiation by only discussing her webcamming and phone sex work. As she states:
The person I am seeing at the moment is quite casual right now. He knows about the webcam and the phone chat but not about the escorting. So I am not sure what would happen if it kind of progressed. But at the moment he only knows about the other two. But for the other married women in this study, their husbands were fully aware of their work. Penelope (partner, with one grown-up child) is open with her partner but does lead a ‘double life’ in relation to her work, family members and most friendships. For these respondents, digital sex work was not incompatible with a relationship that is monogamous, in that they do not have other direct sexual relationships, but do engage in digitally-mediated sexual interactions for money with other men, thus complicating traditional sexual binaries. For the women in this study, the majority did not lead a ‘double life’ in relation to their intimate partners but did so with their wider social networks due to the uncertainty that they may be socially excluded or discriminated against in their workplaces. Thus, the distinction between a ‘private’ self and a professional ‘sex work’ self was not always clear cut.

Yet, maintaining privacy in a digital environment is challenging. Kirsty did not choose to come out as a sex worker, but rather she was identified by someone and decided to embrace the identity rather than deny it. ‘One of my friends found my profile online and all of the people who I was initially worried about seeing, they all knew. So, it was like, there is no need to hide it anymore’. But when Rachel (age 30) was recognised by a customer – whom she had only met online – she was keen to deny her involvement in sex markets as it was in a familial context, where she was embodying the identity of mother and daughter at a family party. The person used her sex worker pseudonym, ‘luckily “Suzanne” isn’t my real name, so I denied all knowledge. I just had to brazen it out’, and it appeared Rachel was able to divert the unwanted attention. It is interesting that an ‘offline’ strategy of using a pseudonym, as used by sex workers in Sanders (2005) study, worked to maintain her secret identity.

It is commonly considered that online privacy is impossible to maintain as personal data is sold and resold, as well as the risks associated with hacking. For instance, the infamous case
of a dating platform for married people – Ashley Madison – was hacked and the personal details of the members, including names, dates of birth and street addresses were posted online (Hern, 2015). Furthermore, there are concerns regarding online state surveillance, although this was not one voiced by my respondents. In addition, from an individual perspective, customers are able to copy images and videos, and post them on other platforms. As Kirsty explained,

> on [webcam platform] you have people sat there all night recording you and then posting it online…Cos I am the copy right owner so I just filed with the DMCA [Digital Millennium Copyright Act] and they get it shut down within 48 hours, normally. I find out who owns the server of the website and then find the people and then email them directly. I have a formal DMCA letter off the website that is really… you know… I just put my initials at the end of it, and then usually they get shut down dead quick.

Kirsty was working many unpaid hours to keep on top of this. When I interviewed her a year later, she was resigned to the fact this was out of her control and expressed regretfully:

> I think I have just accepted it is just out of my hands. Once it is on the internet it is pretty much on the internet. There is nothing I can do about it so I have just accepted it. Otherwise I don’t know, I was pretty much just spending my whole life trying to get them took down.

Similarly, Sanders et al., (2018b) found in their survey of Internet sex workers, that a significant amount of time was committed to maintaining their privacy online, and was a particular concern for those who provided webcam/phone services. The risk of being disclosed as a sex worker is not a new risk, but there are new risks associated with technology because of the comparative ease in accessing images, videos and even personal information online and distributing the content, often without the consent of the sex worker, thus, further questioning the ability, if desired, to maintain a ‘double life’. Digital communications challenge binaries of private public.

> Nevertheless, maintaining a secret identity may not always be problematic. Sylvia describes how she managed her sex worker identity:

> It is absolutely simple. When I am at home I am myself. And when here at the flat I am Mrs Smith [pseudonym changed]. No problem at all. No problem at all. That is half the
fun. I like the secret. It gives me pleasure. So close to home, right under people’s noses (Sylvia, escort, webcam and phone/text provider).

As noted by Brenets and Sanders (2010), the sex industry profits from being a ‘little bit deviant’ and for Sylvia some of the appeal of working in the adult industry is the deviancy and secrecy. Similarly to Tyler’s (2012) account of Soho sex workers, it is the coexistence of attraction and repulsion towards Sylvia’s work that excites her. She ‘revels’ in the knowledge of the taboo nature of what she does. For a retired teacher in her early sixties, she is performing her gender differently than what is expected of her (Butler, 2004). Yet, she also wishes to maintain her privacy, mainly because of her concern of her sons finding out. As she states: ‘I am always afraid [of] being found out. It has never happened to me but there’s always a possibility’.

This is not a systematic comparative study, but the data has revealed specific gender dynamics in relation to motivations to start digital sex work, which is linked to their sexual and gender identities. It is of note that the men in the study were all single, with the exception of Jason, who had married Fiona, a sex worker, and then started selling sex with her. Unlike the women, it was not compatible for the men to sell sex and be in a monogamous relationship. Paul does not identify as homosexual, but had been selling sex (escorting, webcam and phone) to men for the last nine years. When discussing relationships outside of sex markets, he described relationships with women. His conflicted self is demonstrated in the following extract:

If I was in a relationship with somebody I would want it to be exclusive and not with the adult side of things... I have just been single all the time I have done the adult stuff. I have not even got into a relationship with an escort cos I am not sure how I could deal with that... I am not sure I would want to be sharing my partner with lots of other people. I have never even done swinging before within relationships. I am not sure I could face seeing my partner with another guy effectively. So, it is strange as open-minded as I am[...] I still think I have completely got two minds on my private life: my adult side of things [selling sex], and my general private life [heterosexual identity]. Family values are instilled inside me and will never go. Effectively. I do think I am deep down, I am not waiting, but knowing if I am going to get into a relationship it is going to be that kind of exclusive – eventually living together – you know perhaps not kids now. I have got a grown-up daughter from a previous relationship and I think at 45 the
way I look at things I don’t want any more children. But you don’t know, I would be looking at the more traditional family kind of relationship than the more open sort of thing. Although I wouldn’t mind sharing with them what I have done. If I got to meet someone and I really liked them and if I thought it would put the relationship in jeopardy cos of what I have done then I would keep it to myself but then I would have to live with that risk that it might come out to them. If somebody saw me or said he was a male escort. I don’t think I could necessarily lie about it. So, it is just something I guess me having done this it is something I have to live with now. It will work out, when and if it needs to. I will just have to live, I cannot change what has happened in the past, deal with it as and when it happens, effectively.

He not only leads a double life, keeping his ‘square work’ (Bowen, 2015) and sex work separate, but also his sexuality within his private life. As he says ‘I still think I have completely two minds on my private life: my adult side of things [selling sex] and my general private life [heterosexual identity]. This can be theorised as ‘double stigma’. It seems Paul is grappling with two potentially stigmatising identities as a man who acts on his sexual desires to have sex with men, and a man who sells sex (Koken et al., 2010; Minichiello et al., 2013).

Calvin navigates these potentially stigmatising labels, by asserting an identity according with traditional notions of male sexuality – promiscuity and sexual prowess (Hollway, 1984; Vanwesenbeeck, 2013):

Whereas even the females I see online for free just for sex they have to be able to compartmentalize the fact that it is just sex. You know you are never going to know what I do for a living, never gonna know my real age, you are never gonna know everything about me. You are just gonna come round here, and we are gonna have amazing sex you are gonna get a feeling like you have never had before sexually but it is not love. Then you are gonna go back to your husband or fuck off back to your life or whatever.

Within this hyper-masculine identity Calvin creates, he rejects the idea of monogamous heterosexuality and downplays his role as a man who sells erotic massages to men, rather focussing on the women he has sex with:

Calvin: They [women] want to settle down and have a relationship, treat her like a princess, in return he will be particularly bored. So will she because that will last for about half an hour. And she will be like “God! Why am I lying on the sofa with this fat
slob?” But she will want that. It happens to the blokes as well. The blokes as well. You know. People on online dating sites are looking for the love of their life as well.

Helen: Are you single at the moment?

Calvin: You can’t do it [sell sex] if you are with somebody. You would have to lie and I am as honest as they come. I choose not to have a partner so I don’t have to lie.

In the main, there was a gendered difference; for the men and the gender-fluid person, sex work was categorised as incompatible with a long-term relationship, which is to be avoided so they do not need to lead a double life. Yet, as men who sell sexual services to men, and identify as heterosexual, they are already leading a double life.

For the men who had ‘come out’ as homosexual and the person who had ‘come out’ as gender-fluid they appeared to be less conflicted with their gender and sexual identity and were able to lead a more ‘authentic’ life without separating their sex work from the other aspects of their lives. As Joe put it:

I operate [as a sex worker] as open secrets. If someone was to specifically ask me about it, then I’d go, “Yes, and?” If they don’t want to know, I am not exactly going to go, “Oh, I was doing this [sex work]”.

Antonio was also open about his involvement in sex markets with some friends and family, and linked his activities to his identity as part of a hedonistic ‘party’ lifestyle. His accounts reflected findings in other studies that suggest there is a normalisation of commercial sex for some men in the gay community (Koken et al., 2004, 2010; Minichiello et al., 2013; MacPhail et al., 2015).

7.8 : Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that those in this study, in particular women, used digital sex work to manage economic uncertainties produced by an insecure and unstable labour market in conjunction with an erasure of welfare support. Despite many, although not all, of the respondents having economic, cultural and social capital. In a competitive market, digital sex
workers use the technical infrastructure to ‘hustle’, creating a portfolio of work by expanding services and building an online identity. This is not unique to this form of entrepreneurialism, as increasingly even individuals with relative privilege find themselves adjusting to an insecure labour market and taking on new skills, often drawing on opportunities digital communication technologies have created, what Taylor and Luckman describe as the ‘privatisation of responsibility for a worker’s economic position’ (2018: 7). Under neoliberalism, the marketisation of sex and intimacy erodes the liberal myth that the market is separate to sex. This is evident in the traceable and therefore taxable financial record of the payments of digitally-mediated sex services, and in the ease in which respondents reported engaging in digital sex markets, often through dating apps, and the use of mainstream social media platforms and apps to advertise their sexual services.

Further, I have argued that limited notions of sexual binaries still exist, as seen in the difficulties in resisting the whore/Madonna binary, but there is evidence, as seen in this study, that there are shifts in understandings regarding gender roles and sexual norms. In particular, the young women in this study (e.g. Megan, Kirsty, Rachel) show that their attitudes to sexual practices and gender roles are more liberal and that, as argued by Gill (2008), capitalise on their sexual self, thus giving them a feeling of empowerment. This also extends to the older women in the study who had taken charge of their sexuality by capitalising on it, demanding sexual attention and having their sexuality validated through payments. As argued by Brown (2015) and Gill (2008) neoliberalism demands agency through entrepreneurialism. The workers in this study did not have to navigate classist and racist stereotypes in their presentation of their sexual self, thus they are able to embody a neoliberal agent who is rational, unapologetic, ambitious and independent (Gill, 2008), rather than having to resist ideas of classist irresponsibility or racist hypersexuality (Bay-Cheng, 2015). In sum, they are able to narrate their sexual selves as agents, not victims, which they are. However, this is problematic as does not allow women to
identify problematic sexual behaviour, as it risks destabilising their sexual agency, and them having to adopt a ‘victim’ label albeit temporally.

This is further seen in the complex negotiations of sex work stigma. Rather than appear as ‘victims’ of stigma, digital sex workers engage in a number of processes to present their work as economically and sexually legitimate. In a context where normative values regarding sexuality and gender are changing, and there is a valorisation of the market and entrepreneurialism, stigma as a defining attribute to sex work is destabilised and leading a ‘double life’ is not complete for many in this study. However, the fear of social repercussions such as discrimination and exclusion persist and are presented as individualised risks that can be tolerated and managed by market devices such as platforms, payment for services and the emotional labour of the workers.
Chapter 8: Conclusion

I conclude the thesis by restating the aims of the study and presenting the answers to the questions as stipulated in the introduction. This is followed by a summary of how the research contributes to the literature on sex work and digital labour. In the final section, I discuss the implications of the findings on current policies on sex work and what the results mean to current thinking about sex work and how the findings open up further questions on digital sex markets, and labour markets more broadly.

The aim of the study was to present the construction, structures and operations of digital sex markets. This has been carried out by analysing data collected from multiple online and offline sources, including thirty-three qualitative interviews with customers and workers, digital documentary analysis, ethnographic online observations, an online survey with customers and data mined from the current leading multi-service sex work platform, Adultwork. This has led to findings that unpack how the structures, factors and practices of digital sex markets impact on the working lives of digital sex workers and how the latter and their customers negotiate the new digital environment.

The first research question sought to explore the continuities and changes digital communication technologies have brought to sex markets. Without doubt, digital transformations have significantly changed the economic organisation of sex work. The analysis shows that digital sex markets are not economically ‘Other’, but part of the formal economy. Digitally-mediated modalities of sex work are not part of the cash-in-hand economy, which continues to be dominant for most direct sex work and for offline sex markets like stripping, but they are formalised through a digital record, thus making the services taxable, in regard to income tax and, when goods are sold, subject to VAT. For the sex workers in this study, this is largely seen as a chance to legitimate their work and is used as a way to resist marginalisation and pay taxes on their earnings. Indeed, this study has shown that digital sex
work, as is often the case with sex work more generally, is a way to avoid economic marginalisation. That is, to avoid being economically excluded due to a low or no income and to remain an active member of a consumer society. This study has found this is particularly the experience of the women in this study. Women continue to be economically marginalised in the labour market, and digital sex work was a way to overcome this for some women in this study.

The women often presented themselves as sexual entrepreneurs, forming part of a wider trend in the labour market, which in recent decades has seen a valorisation of entrepreneurship (Gill, 2008; Luckman, 2015; Ikonen, 2018; Taylor, 2018). Women adopted the role of entrepreneur and celebrated the flexibility and choice this form of labour offered, in regard to working hours and the income generated; however, my findings complicate the concept of ‘choice’ without constraints. This research has shown the ‘choice’ of digital sex workers is partial because it is effected by technical market devices. This moves the debate beyond the idea that sex workers are either forced into sex work and/or coerced during the economic transaction, or that they have ‘free’ choice. Drawing on multiple online and offline sources, the analysis shows that agency is an intricate and complex process, which is shaped by several market devices that impose constraints and demands. For instance, sex workers’ control over working practices, such as prices, hours and services offered, and how they ‘choose’ to present themselves online is co-created by market rules (Çalışkan and Callon, 2010). To be part of digital sex markets, workers have to be responsive to the rules created by market devices to generate an income from their sexual labour.

The data reveals that the supply of digital sex workers is at saturation point, which is pushing prices down, and maintaining the desired income requires digital sex workers to hustle. This has also been reported on forms of sex work that take place offline, for instance strippers, who also operate in a highly-competitive market which compromises their earning opportunities (Hardy and Sanders, 2016). The devaluation of digitally-mediated sexual services
due to the highly-competitive market compromised the potential of working flexible hours. Digital sex workers often worked many hours for free to promote themselves online, thus producing profitable content for sex work platforms. This labour process was under-estimated by the workers interviewed. The data reveals that, like most labour in the digital age, free labour is embedded in digital sex work.

The findings show the labour (paid and unpaid) of digital sex workers benefits the customers, by increasing their choice and availability of sexual services. Customers in this study discussed being able to choose less expensive services, including finding sexual gratification in browsing sex work platforms, viewing ‘freeview’ videos, some webcam shows and contacting sex workers for free via email. The findings from this study show that there is sexual satisfaction in browsing and emailing, as suggested by Robinson and Moskowitz, (2013) and Sanders et al. (2018b). These ‘services’ are currently being provided without payment from digital sex workers as part of their portfolio of work. This is not because digital sex workers ‘choose’ to provide these for free, but rather the market rules dictate it. As discussed by customers, they were able to access services ‘in the comfort of their own home’, without having to go anywhere ‘seedy’, even when they ‘did not want to spend money’. Digital communication technologies have increased financial, geographical and material access to sexual services. In this way, as I have shown, digital sex markets are a ‘buyers’ market’, where supply outstrips demand.

In addition to the changes presented above, the findings also revealed continuities in the organisation of sex markets. The findings uncover a greater diversity in regard to who sells sex and who buys sex, than studies of offline markets suggest (for example, Campbell, 1998; O’Connell Davidson, 1998; Phoenix, 2017) and current policies on sex work recognise (c.f. Ashford, 2009; Scoular et al., 2019); however, overwhelmingly, sex work remains a feminised form of labour. The majority, but not all of the workers interviewed for this study were women.
The sample of customers in this study was small, so I cannot be conclusive, but data from the online survey and from the accounts of digital sex workers also suggest that it is mainly men who buy digitally-mediated sexual services in well-established offline sex markets.

Additional continuities with offline sex markets can be seen in regard to third party management. Although it is argued by Sanders et al. (2016) that sex workers working online have greater control over working practices than those who work offline in saunas and massage parlours, I argue that digital sex workers do remain under a degree of third party management. This is evident by the transaction fees and other administration costs paid to sex work platforms, a common practice in offline sex markets (O’Connell Davidson, 1998; Sanders and Hardy, 2012). The findings show that platforms make a distinction between direct sex work, and digitally-mediated sex work. Direct sex work managed by sex work platforms are not subject to a transaction fee, but a fee is applied to broker the interaction between customers and those providing digitally-mediated services. This economic arrangement ensures platforms stay within the formal law and therefore remain in the market.

Further evidence of third party management is also apparent in the control sex work platforms have over who can access digital sex markets. Profiles can be shut down without notice or reason, leaving the workers without the opportunity for redress. The ‘faceless’ nature of platforms means there are not clear avenues of communication. Furthermore, platforms have a considerable gatekeeping role, excluding some people from accessing digital sex markets, namely, migrant workers and those without a permanent address. This is reflective of the formal laws that, in part, regulate digital sex markets, alongside platform governance.

Related to this, the findings also show that there has been a platformisation of sex markets that has developed from the emergence of digital communication technologies. Digital platforms play a significant role in the management of digitally-mediated services. They are part of the market assemblage and reinforce and establish the rules of the market, such as
relatively high transaction fees in comparison to other digital labour markets, prices for digitally-mediated modalities of sex work and increasing customers’ access to sex markets. Furthermore, platforms are a part of the economic and social inclusion of sex markets into mainstream markets.

The data reveals that sex work platforms are integrated with social media platforms, such as Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Tumblr and Amazon. Digital sex workers use social media platforms for a variety of reasons, such as advertising their services and alerting customers to their availability, creating an online brand to develop a following of customers or ‘fans’, selling access to their social media accounts and using Amazon wish lists to encourage customers to buy them gifts. This is further evidence to support the argument that sex work cannot be described as ‘Other’ from mainstream digital markets, but rather it is very much embedded and included in the digital economy.

From the customers’ perspective, the platformisation of sex markets has further hidden them from public gaze. Customers no longer need to visit specific spaces for commercial sex, such as ‘red light’ areas and strip clubs, but can purchase sexual services from almost anywhere, at any time. Furthermore, unlike digital sex workers who are verified through ID checks, customers in the main can access services without going through any process of verification. Adultwork suggests customers do go through this process, but the choice is left to the customers themselves. In this way, customers can remain anonymous with their privacy protected.

In regard to working practices, the platformisation of sex markets has seen a move to individuals working alone at home. Prior to these digital transformations, telephone sex work, the most established form of mediated sex work, was largely organised in call centres, thus workers had colleagues and a face-to-face relationship with managers (Hall, 1995; Flowers, 1998; Mattley, 1998; Guidroz and Rich, 2010). This is a shift seen more widely in labour
markets (Huws et al. 2018; Taylor and Luckman, 2018), but in sex markets it is reinforced by the brothel-keeping laws that have normalised sex workers working alone, due to the risk of criminalisation if found working together (Sanders et al., 2016). Working alone does increase risks for digital sex workers, as seen in the case of a woman who died in early 2019 after a webcam show involving asphyxiation role play which went wrong (Drury, 2019). My research supports the view that brothel-keeping laws should be overhauled so sex workers can work together, thus increasing their safety. Under current legislation the possession of pornography that involves role play such as asphyxiation is criminalised (Criminal Justice and Immigration Act s.63); however, as I have argued it is unclear how this Act can be applied to digitally-mediated services that are instantaneous, direct and short-lived. It relies on sex workers reporting customers to the police or platforms, or constant police surveillance. The level of policing required would be costly and raises serious questions regarding online privacy.

This leads on to one of the key aims of the study, to show how digital sex markets are regulated despite there being no formal laws that specifically refer to digitally-mediated sexual services. However, formal laws continue to play a significant role and cannot be dismissed in the analysis of legislating digital sex markets. In order to keep platforms legal, and therefore viable, sex work platforms work with existing laws. Formal laws criminalise some aspects of sex markets, with a focus on street sex work and migrant sex workers (Scoular, 2010; Sanders et al., 2018a). Laws created to tackle trafficking for sexual exploitation and ‘modern day slavery’, influence the ever-increasing restrictions on migrant sex workers. The platforms respond to this by implementing restrictive policies for migrants. Early documentary analysis of Adultwork’s terms and conditions showed prohibitive access for some EU nationals. Recently, Adultwork carried out an overhaul of their terms and conditions with a dedicated Anti-Slavery Policy that shows an increasing concern on their behalf to respond to the Modern Slavery Act 2015. The platform states they will work closely with law enforcement agencies and employs
technical and human moderators to check content to ensure ‘slavery’ is not part of their ‘supply chain’ (Adultwork, 2019). The new rules on Adultwork require additional verification for all ‘non-UK nationals’, thus increasing restrictions. I argue platforms are part of the structures of discrimination through their techniques of verification of migration status. The anti-trafficking discourse, as discussed in the introduction affects all sex markets.

There has been a slow response or ‘inattentiveness’ (Scoular, 2010: 13) of the UK government to the digital changes of sex markets, and labour markets more generally; however, these findings show that the market is regulated. The regulatory space has been filled by digital platforms developing their own rules and regulations, which are responsive to formal laws but are also driven by economic motives, so as to maintain and grow their position in the market. Findings from this study show that the shadow of criminality in which the digital sex workers operate, means they are more likely to report abuses against them to the platforms that manage their labour, than they are the police. Platforms appear to respond promptly to reports from digital sex workers regarding customer requests that are criminalised under existing sex laws, such as ‘extreme pornography’ or sex with minors. The customer will most likely be blocked from the platform but, as noted, customers do not go through a verification process so can easily re-register on the platform under a different user name. It is ultimately the responsibility of the workers to manage their safety and to assess the ‘morality’ of their work in conjunction with state laws and criminal sanctions. Thus, the government upholds values of free markets and entrepreneurialism and responsibilises individuals to perform ‘appropriate’ sexual labour and consumption, maintaining limited involvement in the market economy.

The final research question asked how the historical and enduring stigma associated with commercial sex is negotiated in the digital age. I have shown that there are processes of differentiation in the regulation of digital sex markets, which is mirrored in the accounts of customers and workers in this study. The findings show the regulatory framework, which
includes platform governance, formal laws and self-governance distance digital sex markets from other sex markets that are criminalised or under greater police scrutiny. In regard to platform governance, Adultwork, for instance, clearly states they do ‘not engage in adult services directly’ and members ‘are not permitted to use the AW site(s) to send or receive payment for any kind of physical meeting’ (Adultwork, 2019); thus distancing the platform’s role as a third party that facilitates the sale of direct sex work. The lack of specific formal laws regarding digitally-mediated sexual services, by default, legitimises digital sex markets. These processes of differentiation are seen in the self-governance of digital sex workers and customers who view digitally-mediated services as less ‘risky’, less ‘immoral’ and ultimately more legitimate forms for sexual consumption and labour, thus distancing and differentiating from other forms of work(ers) such as ’prostitution’ and migrant sex workers. Therefore, digital sex workers were able to present themselves as empowered sexual agents, differentiated from those who are often viewed as ‘victims’.

As sexual entrepreneurs, they were able to demand sexual attention and capitalise on their ‘appropriate’ commodified sexuality. The women in the study were white, native born, heterosexual and were, or considered themselves to be ‘middle class’. In addition, the majority of the women in the study were in long-term relationships and asserted a ‘respectable’ femininity as dutiful, domestic women. They were able to negotiate stigma associated with commercial sex in ways not available to other sex workers due to other intersecting identities. Those in this study are differently located, legally and materially, than those who sell sex on the street. Their citizenship status, race and ethnicity give them privilege and they are able to navigate gender and sexual norms. The women in the study did not experience the full execution of stigma, which leads to disapproval, rejection, exclusion and discrimination because they had degrees of ‘respectability’. Stigma is reduced in this context, due to market devices that reinforce class and race inequalities and differentiate one form of sex work from
another. The entrepreneurialism embodied by digital sex workers was used by some as a way to avoid stigma associated with poverty, and fulfil the obligation in neoliberal Britain to remain active consumers (Gilbert, 2008). Stigma can be associated with other traits such as poverty, and sex work may be a way to avoid other stigmatising labels. From these findings, I challenged the assumption that stigma associated with sex work is monolithic.

8.1: Contribution to the literature on sex work

In addition to the contributions already stated, the particularities of the research, namely bringing production and consumption into the analysis, revealed a blurring of distinct boundaries between sexual consumption and sexual labour. In the consumption literature, the term ‘prosumer’ is used to make sense of the role consumers play in producing online content and therefore profit for platforms (Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010). This study, however, revealed a more complex mixing of production and consumption in the digital age and extends the work of Pettinger (2011, 2016) and Wood (2015) who have argued sexual consumption and production are interrelated. Firstly, workers in this study made an income from their sexual consumption, as part of their portfolio of work. Workers purchased goods, such as knickers and resold them to customers as part of their sexual labour. Secondly, the data revealed that some men in this study inhabited dual roles, as a customer and a worker. It was not simultaneous, as suggested by the concept of a prosumer, but individuals were not limited to being a sex worker, or a customer of sex services. This has been explored in a handful of studies with male sex workers, but remains underexplored in sex work research (Hall, 2007; Matthen et al., 2018). Based on my research, the assumption that individuals are either consumers or sex workers appears to be unjustified because digital communication technologies have transformed the way we work, consume, and play.
An important finding from this study is that there are complex and diverse sexual identities, practices and behaviours in digital sex markets, and roles as described above. By including men and those with gender-fluid identities, I have challenged assumptions that have been made when analysing sex work through the lens of patriarchy. That is, workers are victims of male violence and customers the perpetrators of violence. The accounts of some men and the person who identified as gender-fluid explicitly stated that sex work had been a place to explore their gender and sexual identities. The women in the study were less likely to directly state this, but two of the older women in the study had used the market to explore their sexuality. By engaging in sex work later on in life, they challenged normative ideas of femininity, and performed their gender and sexual identities in ways that displaced gender conventions (Butler, 1993). These findings add another layer of complexity to the experiences of stigma commonly associated with commercial sex. Digital sex work can be used to explore stigmatising aspects of peoples’ gender and sexual identity, thus stigma associated with commercial sex is not monolithic, nor automatically oppressive. These findings have direct policy implications, as policy regarding sex work needs to address this diversity in experiences, identities and sexualities rather than assuming sex work equates to violence against women.

8.2: Limitations

There were limitations to the study due to the sample. The study did not set out to be a comparative study on gender, but the data did reveal specific gendered understandings of engagement in digital sex markets. The study sought to unpack the diversity of those who buy and sell digitally-mediated sexual services. The sample did reveal diversity in genders, sexuality, socio-economic status, educational attainment, diversity in services offered and purchased, and time engaged in sex markets; however, further research would benefit from a
more systematic comparative study on gender, highlighting the differences in motivations, working practices, and perceived risks and stigma for digital sex workers.

Importantly, as raised in Chapter Three, and by Jones (2015a), Sanders et al. (2018b), and Cunningham et al. (2018) more research is needed to consider the impact of the development of digital sex markets on migrant sex workers. This research has shown that there are exclusionary practices that are led by platform governance, in response to formal laws that increasingly make it difficult for migrant sex workers to work in the UK. The sample in this study did not allow for me to unpack this further, and a study focussing on the impact of these exclusions would be illuminating, but would require specific connections with migrant sex workers, as discussed by Sanders in her studies with online sex workers (see Sanders et al., 2016; Sanders et al., 2018b).

Adding to this, further research systematically comparing digital sexual labour and other feminised platform-managed labour would be revealing and would add to current policy and academic discussions on digital labour and governance, bringing sex work into mainstream discussions on labour (Rand, in print).

8.3: Policy implications
The research has a number of policy implications. First, the data reveals that digital sex workers use this form of labour as causal work to manage economic risk, and to fund consumerist lifestyles. In some ways, digital sex workers would rather negotiate the social risks associated with sex work, such as discrimination and exclusion, than face stigma associated with poverty and/or relying on the state for an income. This challenges the dominant policy approach to transitions out of sex markets in Britain.

‘Exiting’ the sex industry is grounded in the UK’s policy approach to sex work, straddling the abolitionist view that ‘prostitution’, in all its forms, should be abolished, while at
the same time acknowledging sex work is a form of labour (Ham and Gilmour, 2016), albeit a deviant one. The publication *A Coordinated Prostitution Strategy* (Home Office, 2006), which largely focussed on street-based sex work, endorsed a state-sponsored exiting programme to coerce women (and men), particularly street sex workers, to reform through compulsory rehabilitation or face criminal sanctions (Scoular and O’Neill, 2007; Sanders, 2007). Research on transitioning out of the sex industry has traditionally focussed on street sex work. It is only in recent years that research has looked at other sex markets, such as Sanders’ (2007) comparative study with indoor workers and street workers, and Maher et al.’s (2013) study with indoor sex workers in Victoria, Australia. Research on independent indoor sex workers suggest there is ‘burnout’ (Vanwesenbeeck, 2005) due, in part, to the stigma and the physicality of the work. The evidence from this research strongly suggests that there is mobility in and out of sex markets and between sex work modalities. Digitally-mediated sex work is used as a way to manage ‘burnout’ for those who provide, or who have provided direct sex work. Digitally-mediated sex work is also used as a long-term economic strategy to avoid poverty or worklessness.

This study shows that digital sexual labour is a desirable work option for those with racial, class and educational privilege because of the autonomy over working practices but also, for some, it is perceived to be ‘fun’ and ‘exciting’, sometimes following on and/or in conjunction with non-commercial digital sex markets. This has direct policy implications, as labour policies and sex work polices are not up-to-date with the working practices of those who sell services on digital platforms. Sex work policy is outdated due to the emphasis on abolishing street sex work – a form of sex work that is considered in research to be a small percentage of sex markets in the UK (Ashford, 2009; Sanders et al., 2016; Phoenix, 2017). This study provides evidence of the heterogeneity of sexual labour in regard to motivations, working practices, and worker identities. The findings of this study have implications, not only for sex
work policy per se, but for broader policy discussions about Internet sex. I have argued that
digital sex markets are included in the formal economy, operate in conjunction with social
media platforms and are part of the monetisation of sex and intimacy in neoliberalism. Digital
sex markets do not require specific and separate policies, as seen with the discriminatory
SESTA/FOSTA laws in the USA, but should be viewed as important to the digital economy
and therefore included in policy discussions regarding digital labour, digital governance and
online privacy. If there are to be laws regarding sex work, a clear distinction needs to be made
between trafficking and voluntary sex work. As Amnesty International state in their position on
commercial sex, ‘Laws on sex work should focus on protecting people from exploitation and
abuse, rather than trying to ban all sex work and penalise sex workers’ (Amnesty International,
2016). This recommendation, as any policy suggestion regarding sex work, should be evaluated
and discussed by sex workers themselves who might also have further views, based on their
direct experience, on how to regulate this market. As the International Committee on the Rights
of Sex Workers in Europe state:

Supporting sex workers’ rights means understanding the diversity and complexity of
our lives and involving sex workers from diverse communities in decision making,
policy making and debates (2017: 2).
References


Bleakley P (2014) “500 tokens to go private”: Camgirls, cybersex and feminist


Jones A (2016) “I get paid to have orgasms”: Adult webcam models’ negotiation of pleasure


Rivers-Moore M (2014) Waiting for the state: Sex work and the neoliberal governance of


Snee H (2013) Making ethical decisions in an online context: Reflections on using blogs to


**Acts of UK Parliament**

*Communications Act 2001* s.120 – 123. London: HMSO.

*Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015* (c.33). London: HMSO.

*Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008* (c.63). London: HMSO.


*Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001* (c.46). London: HMSO.


*Modern Slavery Act 2015* (c.54). London: HMSO.

Policing and Crime Act 2009 (c.14 and c.16). London: HMSO.


Serious Crime Act 2015 (c.68). London: HMSO.

Sexual Offences Act 1985 (c.44). London: HMSO.

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Sexual Offences Act (Scotland) 1976 (c.67)

Street Offences Act 1959 (7&8 Eliz.2, c.57). London: HMS.

Television Programmes


Platforms


Haloboys (2016) www.haloboys.com (no longer available)


**Appendix 1: Memos of sex work/adult platforms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platform</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cam4</strong></td>
<td>launched in 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience:</td>
<td>Unspecified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genders of workers:</td>
<td>Women, men, transgender and couples.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services offered:</td>
<td>Webcam (group shows and private shows), photographs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How customers pay:</td>
<td>Customers buy tokens, the more tokens they buy the cheaper each token becomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How workers are paid:</td>
<td>Workers are paid $0.10 per token. Payments can be requested anytime once the worker has earned $50.00.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fee paid to the platform:</td>
<td>Ranges from 40 per cent to 50 per cent. The more tokens a customer buys the less commission Cam4 makes. Workers are always paid $0.10 per token.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexa data (if available):</td>
<td>Global rank #967 UK ranked #3,404.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional comments:</td>
<td>Monthly competitive with cash prizes. This site shows a lot of content without customers needing to pay to view. The site is translated into 42 different languages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media:</td>
<td>Snapchat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographical location:</td>
<td>Ontario, Canada.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platform</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CandyCrib.com</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience:</td>
<td>Heterosexual men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genders of workers:</td>
<td>Women only ‘girly, flirty, nice but naughty’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services offered:</td>
<td>Photos, videos; live webcamming; pre-booked webcam shows; pay to view photo shoots.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How customers pay:</td>
<td>Monthly subscription and tips through tokens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How workers are paid:</td>
<td>Tokens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fee paid to the platform:</td>
<td>35 per cent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexa data (if available):</td>
<td>Global rank #3,441,643 UK Rank n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional comments:</td>
<td>Promotion of teen girls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliated websites:</td>
<td>Xtreme playpen; nakedglamour; mynaughtyselfies, double trouble, myfanspage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media:</td>
<td>Twitter, Snapchat; Instagram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographical location:</td>
<td>Gilbrator, UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Platform</td>
<td>Chaturbate.com launched in 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience:</td>
<td>Unspecified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genders of workers:</td>
<td>Women, men, transgender and couples.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services offered:</td>
<td>Webcam (group shows and private shows), photographs, fan clubs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How customers pay:</td>
<td>Can watch webcam shows for free, but customers buy tokens to tip webcammers. 100 tokens cost $10.99 - $7.99, the price goes down the more tokens a customer buys.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How workers are paid:</td>
<td>Workers are paid $0.05 per token. Payments can be requested anytime once the worker has earned $50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fee paid to the platform:</td>
<td>40 – 50 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexa data (if available):</td>
<td>Rated 114 in the global rank of websites as of March 2018.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional comments:</td>
<td>Available in 15 languages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliated websites:</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media:</td>
<td>Twitter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographical location:</td>
<td>California, US</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Audience:</td>
<td>Anyone who wants to buy fetish and ‘amateur’ porn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genders of workers:</td>
<td>All genders and sexualities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services offered:</td>
<td>Downloadable video clips, DVDs, photos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How customers pay:</td>
<td>Pay to view.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How workers are paid:</td>
<td>Price set by worker for each clip. Minimum and maximum price stipulated by the platform.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fee paid to the platform:</td>
<td>40 per cent of payment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexa data (if available):</td>
<td>Global rank # 1,394 UK Rank # 284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional comments:</td>
<td>Videos4Sale, Images4Sale.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliated websites:</td>
<td>Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Pinterest, Tumblr, YouTube, Fetlife.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media:</td>
<td>Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Pinterest, Tumblr, YouTube, Fetlife.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographical location:</td>
<td>Florida, US</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Gayswap.com

**Audience:** Men who buy sex services from men  
**Genders of workers:** Men and gender-fluid  
**Services offered:** Webcam, phone, escort, text, IM  
**How customers pay:** Tokens through online payments.  
**How workers are paid:** Fee paid to the platform: 30 per cent  
**Alexa data (if available):** n/a  
**Additional comments:** At the beginning of this study (2015/2016), gayswap.com was almost identical to Adultwork in regard to services offered, architecture of the platform and the business model. The above information is based on this. In September, 2019 the site had changed to a dating site providing profiles and the choice to meet or not, more in line with Tinder dating app.  
**Affiliated websites:** Adultwork.com, SwingFree.co.uk  
**Social media:** n/a  
**Geographical location:** Windsor, UK.

### Glamstarslive.com

**Audience:** Heterosexual men.  
**Genders of workers:** Women ‘glamour models’, as have to be a published ‘glamour model’ to work on the site.  
**Services offered:** Webcam shows (private and group shows).  
**How customers pay:** Credits purchased on the platform.  
**How workers are paid:** Prices per minute set by workers.  
**Fee paid to the platform:** 35 per cent.  
**Alexa data (if available):** n/a  
**Additional comments:** Scheduled shows that customers book to view. Customers can view the show again in the ‘theatre’ section of the website.  
**Affiliated websites:** Glamose (photography and videos); cozynfrog.com; 69DIR.com; Ynot.com; WebmasterVault.com.  
**Social Media** Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.  
**Geographical location** Cheltenham, UK.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>ManchesterLads launched in 2002</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Audience:</td>
<td>Northwest and Yorkshire men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genders of workers:</td>
<td>Gay or bisexual men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services offered:</td>
<td>Escorts and massages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How customers pay:</td>
<td>Direct to workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How workers are paid:</td>
<td>Prices set by workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fee paid to the platform:</td>
<td>£45 per month to advertise. No commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexa data (if available):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional comments:</td>
<td>A website to advertise offline services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliated websites:</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographical location</td>
<td>Manchester</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>ManyVids, launched in 2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Audience:</td>
<td>Diversity of videos available to diverse sexual desires, genders and identities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genders of workers:</td>
<td>Female, male, transgender, couples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services offered:</td>
<td>Webcamming (public and private), webcamming with interactive vibrators ‘teledidoldonics’, prerecorded videos and pictures for downloading, texting and phone calls, online shop, fan club subscriptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How customers pay:</td>
<td>Can pay via cryptocurrency and through the sites ‘MV’ wallet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How workers are paid:</td>
<td>Prices set by workers, although there is a minimum and a maximum. $3.99 - $999.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payment is every two weeks, once $50 is made.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 cent per token</td>
<td>40 percent of sales goes to Manyvids.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fee paid to the platform:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexa data (if available):</td>
<td>Global rank #965. UK rank #255.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional comments:</td>
<td>Also has an online magazine, podcast, youtube channel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>According to their website, manyvids promotes sex worker rights through a campaign ‘We are Many’ and donated $11,800 to sex workers outreach project.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliated websites:</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media</td>
<td>YouTube</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographical location</td>
<td>Montreal, Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Platform</td>
<td>OnlyFans launched in 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience:</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genders of workers:</td>
<td>According to the platform: YouTubers, fitness trainers, models, content creators, public figures and influencers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services offered:</td>
<td>Videos, photographs and online messages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How customers pay:</td>
<td>Monthly membership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How workers are paid:</td>
<td>Workers charge between $4.99 - $49.99 for each customer to subscribe to their page. The worker decides the fee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fee paid to the platform:</td>
<td>20 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexa data (if available):</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional comments:</td>
<td>Linked to the concept of micro celebrities. The platform links from individuals’ social media accounts so ‘fans’ and ‘followers’ can pay to see photos and videos of their favourite ‘celebrities’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliated websites:</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media:</td>
<td>Twitter, Instagram and Facebook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographical location:</td>
<td>London, UK</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>Only tease</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Audience:</td>
<td>Heterosexual men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genders of workers:</td>
<td>Women, ‘glamour models only’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services offered:</td>
<td>Photos, videos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How customers pay:</td>
<td>Monthly membership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How workers are paid:</td>
<td>Tokens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fee paid to the platform:</td>
<td>unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexa data (if available):</td>
<td>Global rank #56,351 UK rank n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional comments:</td>
<td>Presented as erotic rather than pornographic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliated websites:</td>
<td>Only opagues, only secretaries, only silk and satin, only sportswear, only costumes, only Melanie and only Carla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media</td>
<td>Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, YouTube.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographical location</td>
<td>Kent, UK.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Platform</td>
<td>Streamate.com launched 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience:</td>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genders of workers:</td>
<td>Women and Men (presented in a binary).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services offered:</td>
<td>Live video chat site, pre-recorded videos, private and group shows.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How customers pay:</td>
<td>Free to view but not sexual content until customers pay. Pay per minute to chat to performers in private, group and exclusive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How workers are paid:</td>
<td>Set own prices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fee paid to the platform:</td>
<td>65 per cent of payment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexa data (if available):</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional comments:</td>
<td>Podcasts produced by Streamate for workers on how to maximise their income. Also organise live events in the US.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliated websites:</td>
<td>Cammodels, sexyladyshows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media</td>
<td>Twitter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographical location</td>
<td>Seattle, US and Amsterdam, NL.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2: Sample email to sex workers on Adultwork

I hope this finds you well. My name is Helen and I am a PhD student at the University of Essex. I am conducting research about indirect sexual services, web cam, phone, text, IM etc.

This is a genuine request and here is a link to my academic profile: https://www.essex.ac.uk/sociology/staff/profile.aspx?ID=4482

I would love to interview you if you could spare an hour or so. The interview can take place at a time and in a style that is convenient to you - on the phone, text, email, skype, face to face or a combination.

I take a non-judgmental approach and will treat everything you say to me with confidentiality.

Due to limitations on my research budget, I cannot pay you for your time but can offer a small token of thanks with a £20 gift voucher for a shop of your choice.

If you have any questions, do get in contact.

Best wishes

Helen
Appendix 3: Newspaper advertisement

ARE YOU A CUSTOMER OF:
• Web cam • Chat lines
• Online chat rooms

We are looking for VOLUNTEERS to take part in a research interview for academic study

Email: techres@essex.ac.uk
Appendix 4: Recruitment flyer

I am looking for research participants for an academic study with the University of Essex on sexual services mediated by technology.

- DO YOU CALL TELEPHONE SEX LINES?
- DO YOU PROVIDE ADULT CHAT ON PHONE LINES?
- DO YOU USE WEB CAM?
- ARE YOU A WEB CAM MODEL?
- DO YOU GET PAID TO SEND INSTANT MESSAGES?
- DO YOU USE COMMERCIAL CHAT ROOMS FOR SEXUAL SERVICES?

If you are a customer or a provider of web cam, chat lines or chat rooms I would like to interview you about your experiences. The interview can take place in a way (phone, IM, email, face to face or a combination) and at a time that is convenient to you.

Interested? Email technologyresearch@essex.ac.uk giving a brief outline of your involvement in this area.
Appendix 5: Recruitment tweet

Do you make money providing sexual services via web cam, phone, text or chat rooms?

As part of my PhD research I want to hear about people’s experiences working as webcammers and/or phone/text sex operators? Interviews will take about an hour and can take place face to face, on the phone or skype? All information will be confidential and anonymised.

For more information PM me or email technologyresearch@essex.ac.uk
Appendix 6: Interview schedule (workers)

Information given prior to the interview

My name is Helen Rand, I am a PhD student at the University of Essex. My research is part funded by the University and partly by administration work I do for my supervisor. The aim of my research is to find out how technologies have shaped the adult entertainment industry, from both the customers and the workers perspective.

The purpose of the interview is to learn more about you and your experience of working in sex markets. I want to hear your experiences in your own words so I will not ask too many questions, but I may ask you to clarify things or tell me more about certain things/events/experiences. I am not here to make judgements and will do my best not to make assumptions about your experiences.

I have split the interview into three stages. In the first stage I will ask you to tell me about your life in general, how you would describe yourself, and any particularly important moments you would like to share. In the second phase I will ask you to tell me about your present situation; and the final stage of the interview will ask you to think about how your present experiences will shape your future. The purpose of the interview is to understand your experience of digital sex markets so talk to me about things you think are relevant.

I will tape record the interview, but will not record the visuals (if interview is via skype).

I want to reassure you that your name, and any information that could mean you would be recognised will be changed, such as name of a town, or employer. Only my supervisors and I will have access to the recording. Once it is transcribed I will delete the recording. Both the recording and the transcription will be encrypted and stored in a password protected computer.

At any point in this interview you want to stop the interview you can do. You are in control with what information you give and when you give it.
**First Stage**

The first stage of the interview will ask the participant to give a general sketch of their lives and will seek to uncover some characteristics of how they see themselves. This may lead onto a narrative about their role in sex markets

- Identity - can you tell me more about yourself? Age? Gender identity/Sexual identity?
- How this may have changed since being in engaged in sex work?
- Background – family, education,
- Relationships
- Where are they from?
- Ethnicity
- Social networks
- Work history

**Second Stage**

This stage of the interview will explore the present - in particular - their participation in digitally-mediated sex work. I will use the language they have used to describe this in the first part of the interview. For example, if they refer to be web cam models or phone sex operators I will adopt this terminology for the rest of the interview.

- Period of time working in the industry
- How did they get involved?
- Benefits of the work
- Difficulties of the work
- Support and training (professional or personal) needed or received
- Expenses/outgoings
- Experiences/thoughts of the customers
- Female customers?
- Experiences/thoughts about the sector
- Technology – the interface, how it helps, or hinder, if it has made them choose a particular kind of service.
- Other jobs – how it fits with other plans for life or careers
- **Time and money**
  - How much money do you make? What do you spend it on? How many hours a week/day on this work?

**Third Stage**

The third stage in the biographies will ask the participants to consider their future and how they evaluate the experiences they have shared with their plans for the future.

- Do you plan on carrying on doing this work?
- Other sex work?
- How, if at all, does this experience influence decisions for the future?
- How, if at all, has the experience changed how you understand yourself and others?
- Thoughts/experiences of others views on buying/selling sexual services

**Concluding questions:**

- Is there anything else you would like to tell me that you think could be relevant to this research?
- If required, would you be willing to be interviewed again?
- Would you like to see an executive summary of the research when it is finished?
- Do you know of other people who might be willing to talk to me about their experiences?
- If you have any other thoughts on the subject that you would like to send to me, please do email.

I would like to thank you for the time you have given to this research and by way of thanks I will email you Amazon voucher or Sainsbury’s voucher. Do you have a preference?
Appendix 7: Interview schedule (customers)

**Information given prior to the interview**

My name is Helen Rand, I am a PhD student at the University of Essex. My research is part funded by the University and partly by administration work I do for my supervisor. The aim of my research is to find out how technologies have shaped the adult entertainment industry, from both the customers and the workers perspective.

The purpose of the interview is to learn more about you and your experience in TMSS. I want to hear your experiences in your own words so I will not ask too many questions, but I may ask you to clarify things or tell me more about certain things/events/experiences. I am not here to make judgements and will do my best not to make assumptions about your experiences.

I have split the interview into three stages. In the first stage I will ask you to tell me about your life in general, how you would describe yourself, and any particularly important moments you would like to share. In the second phase I will ask you to tell me about your present situation. As you know the interview is about buying sexual services so here I would like to tell me more about this. For example, How it is or isn’t part of your everyday life? And the final stage of the interview will ask you to think about how your present experiences will shape your future.

Remember the purpose of the interview is to understand your experience of TMSS so talk to me about things you think are relevant.

I will tape record the interview, but will not record the visuals (if interview is via skype).

I want to reassure you that your name, and any information that could mean you would be recognised will be changed, such as name of a town, or employer. Only my supervisors and I will have access to the recording. Once it is transcribed I will delete the recording. Both the recording and the transcription will be encrypted and stored in a password protected computer.

At any point in this interview you want to stop the interview you can do. You are in control with what information you give and when you give it.
**Interview outline**

**First stage**

The first stage of the interview will ask the participant to give a general sketch of their lives and will seek to uncover some characteristics of how they see themselves. This may lead onto a narrative about their consumption of TMSS:

- Identity - can you tell me more about yourself? Age? Gender identity/Sexual identity?
- Background – family, education, where are they from?
- Social networks
- Work history
- History of buying sex services (technology or not)

**The second stage**

This stage of the interview will explore the present - in particular - their participation in technology mediated sex.

- Experiences of consuming sexual services –how often, money spent, how they access, where they access
- Thoughts/ experiences of other sexual services or adult entertainment (strip clubs, porn)
- Thoughts on buying sexual services
- Thoughts about those who provide the service
- Use of online sources/forums
- Do you have any concerns?
- Other services?

**The third stage**

This stage in the biographies will ask the participants to consider their future and how they evaluate the experiences they have shared with their plans for the future.

- Other sex markets
- Thoughts/experiences of others views on buying/selling sexual services
- How, if at all, does this experiences you have shared influence your decisions for the future?
- How, if at all, have the experiences you have shared changed how you understand yourself and others?
Is there anything else you would like to tell me that you think could be relevant to this research?

**Concluding questions**

If required, would you be willing to be interviewed again?

Would you like to see a copy of the transcript?

Would you like to see an executive summary of the research when it is finished?

Do you know of other people who might be willing to talk to me about their experiences?

If you have any other thoughts on the subject that you would like to send to me, please do email.

Thank you for your time.
Appendix 8: Online survey

Welcome to the study of digital sex markets!

I am interested in understanding the consumption habits of those who buy adult services online. This is part of a wider study on digital sex markets. You will be asked to answer some questions about your consumption habits. Please be assured that your responses will be kept completely anonymous and confidential.

The study should take you around ten minutes to complete, and you will receive a £5.00 gift voucher for your participation. If you would like to take part in a follow-on telephone interview, you will receive a further £15.00 gift voucher for your participation. Your participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any point during the study, for any reason, and without any prejudice. If you would like to contact the Principal Investigator in the study to discuss this research, please email Helen Rand - Hrand@essex.ac.uk.

By clicking the button below, you acknowledge that your participation in the study is voluntary, you are 18 years of age, and that you are aware that you may choose to terminate your participation in the study at any time and for any reason.

Please note that this survey will be best displayed on a laptop or desktop computer. Some features may be less compatible for use on a mobile device.

- I consent, begin the study (1)
- I do not consent, I do not wish to participate (2)

Q1 What is your age?

- Less than 18 (1)
- 18-24 (2)
- 25-34 (3)
- 35-44 (4)
- 45-54 (5)
- 55-64 (6)
- 65+ (7)
Q2 What gender do you identify with?

- Female (1)
- Male (2)
- Transgender (3)
- Non-binary (4)
- Other, please state (5) ____________________________

Q3 Describe your sexuality

________________________________________________________________

Q4 Describe your relationship status

- Single (1)
- Dating (2)
- In a relationship (3)
- Married or domestic partnership (4)
- Divorced/separated (5)
- Windowed (6)
- Other, please state (7) ____________________________
Q5 Which statement best describes your current employment status?

- Working, as a paid employee (1)
- Working, self-employed (2)
- Not working, not looking for work (3)
- Not working, looking for work (4)
- Retired (5)
- Unable to work (6)
- Student (7)
- Prefer not to answer (8)

Q6 What adult entertainment websites do you access?
________________________________________________________________

Q7 What is your primary reason for visiting adult entertainment websites?
________________________________________________________________

Q8 Do you have a preference for a specific website? If yes, which one(s) and why?
________________________________________________________________
Q9 How often do you visit adult entertainment websites?

- Daily (1)
- 2-3 times per week (2)
- Once per week (3)
- 2-3 times per month (4)
- Monthly (5)
- Once every 2-3 months (6)
- Once every 6 Months (7)
- Once a year (8)
- Less than once a year (9)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Daily 2-3 times a week</th>
<th>Weekly 2-3 times a month</th>
<th>Monthly Every 3 months</th>
<th>Every 6 months</th>
<th>Once a year</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Webcam (1)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone (2)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escort (3)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instant Messing (4)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texts (5)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videos (6)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photographs (7)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q11 Do you buy adult services offline? For example, visiting strip clubs, escort services.

Q12 How often do you buy services offline?

- Daily (1)
- 2-3 times per week (2)
- Once per week (3)
- 2-3 times per month (4)
- Monthly (5)
- Once every 2-3 months (6)
- Once every 6 Months (7)
- Once a year (8)
- Less than once a year (9)

Q13 Do you have a preference for a specific service? If yes, which one(s) and why?

Q14 As a customer, in what ways has the internet changed the experience of buying adult services?

Q15 Approximately, how much money do you spend on adult websites/services?

Q16 Are you comfortable with the amount of money you spend?

Q17 Approximately, how long have you been buying adult services?

Q18 Your time given to this survey is greatly appreciated. If you are willing to take part in a follow up interview, please enter your email address below.
Appendix 9: Digital customer survey: Data overview

About the respondents

The data shows that the majority of respondents identified as heterosexual men in employment, and more likely to be in a relationship.

Gender of respondents

Of the 21 respondents, more than three-quarters of survey respondents identified as men, three as women, one as transgender and one as non-binary.

How would you describe your sexuality?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexual identity</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Straight/Heterosexual</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listless</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pansexual</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustrated</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BDSM/Kinky</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Age of respondents

There was diversity in age, but the majority of the 21 respondents were over 35 at the time of the survey.

Relationship status

22 responded to this question. 13 were in a relationship, 8 were either single, dating or separated.
Employment status

Out of the 21 responses, 17 people were working either as an employee or self-employed.
Sexual consumption behaviour

What adult entertainment websites do you access?

The word cloud shows that the variety of websites used by customers, and the centrality of ‘mainstream’ platforms such as twitter and tumblr in digital sex markets. As the data from Alexa analytics showed, pornhub is the most visited site.

What is your primary reason for visiting adult entertainment sites?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason given</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Masturbation</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking for escorts</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porn</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interact with sex workers</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15 responses with multiple answers

How often do you visit adult entertainment websites?
Of the 15 responses, all visited adult websites regularly, with two thirds of respondents on a daily basis.

What services do you pay for?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Daily</th>
<th>2-3 times a week</th>
<th>Weekly 2-3 times a month</th>
<th>Monthly 2-3 times a month</th>
<th>Every 3 months</th>
<th>Every 6 months</th>
<th>Once a year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Webcam</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escort</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instant Messaging</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texts</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videos</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photographs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15 respondents answered this question, although 3 respondents did not fully complete the table.

The data shows that the majority do not pay for mediated services such as phone, text, instant messaging, but occasionally will pay for videos, photographs and webcams.
### Do you buy services offline?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Services</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Escort</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting strip clubs</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, not specified</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>