Chapter 5

Sex and the City: Male Sex Work and the Negotiation of Stigma and Masculinities

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ABSTRACT

Despite the issue that male sex work involves a substantial proportion of the market and is key to making clear the impact of gender in shaping male sex workers’ experiences and their oftentimes fleeting relationship with male clients, work on sex work has largely focused on female sex workers to a far greater extent than their male counterparts. Subsequently, we know little of the social relations between male sex workers and their male clients. The interactional dynamics of sellers and clients in such settings are rarely considered. The author’s focus, then, is exploring the social interactions between male sex workers and their male clients in particular. I seek to examine the ways in which such interactions could manifest in different settings and contexts within the area of male sex work. For example, I unravel the interactional dynamics in the setting of sexual violence against male sex workers.

INTRODUCTION

Sex and the City: Male Sex Work and the Negotiation of Stigma and Masculinities

In the 1970s, sex role theory began to become contested as there was a gradual interest and focus on the significance of social structures shaping and framing
Masculinities. Post-1970, masculinities became seen as configurations of practices, with the view that gender grows out of social conducts, not something that is wholly possessed or determined in any fashion. Masculinities are negotiated through social and power relations. A sociological perspective, then, largely dominated the field of men and masculinities. Connell (1987) was one of the first pioneers to introduce a new body of sociological work on gender, producing social theory to replace the rigid sex-role theory that emphasised rigid attitudes and social expectations of men and women and placed them in very stiff and deterministic ways while ignoring social and cultural changes and contexts. Instead, Connell introduced the notion that there are power relations between men and women and amongst men, illustrating that social and material practices produce masculinities and femininities through social bodies. She argues that masculinities and femininities are susceptible to ongoing and unpredictable change, shaped by external social forces and historical moments. As an example, Morrell (1998, p. 605) writes that, “Colonialism created new and transformed existing masculinities. Race and class featured prominently in the configuration of these masculinities. Under colonialism positions of domination and subordination were created along the lines of race”. This highlights that race and class feature in particular masculinities, which is important to understanding sex work given that most sex workers are from non-white backgrounds and are economically deprived (Garcia, 2010; Wong et al., 2011). Male sex workers can, however, attempt to configure practices of hegemonic masculinities at particular contexts and times. There are no contexts or settings in which there is an absence of a multiplicity of masculinities at any given time. That is to say that there are multiple masculinities (and femininities) at any time. In this book chapter, I theoretically and conceptually inspect and attempt to make sense of how male sex workers ‘do’ masculinities and femininities at differing contexts, times and places, shaped by social structures.

Despite the issue that male sex work involves a substantial proportion of the market and is key to making clear the impact of gender in shaping male sex workers’ experiences and their oftentimes fleeting relationship with male clients, work on sex work has largely focused on female sex workers to a far greater extent than their male counterparts (Ellison & Weitzer, 2018). Subsequently, we know little of the social relations between male sex workers and their male clients. The interactional dynamics of sellers and clients in such settings is rarely considered (Ellison & Weitzer, 2018). My focus, then, is critically exploring the social interactions between male sex workers and their male clients in particular, considering how gender plays a part in their interactions and the manners in which the unequal distribution and exercise of power is distributed. I seek to examine the ways in which such interactions could manifest in different settings and contexts within the area of male sex work, which will help us to make sense of the kind of relationship that is evident between sex worker and client. For example, I unravel the interactional dynamics in the setting
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