

**TOUCHING ENCOUNTERS:  
THE SEX AND WORK OF MALE-FOR-MALE INTERNET ESCORTS**

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation engages with the sexual stories of 30 male-for-male internet escorts working in Montréal, Ottawa, Toronto (Canada), Houston and New York (USA), as well as London (England). I investigate how these men invoke labour vocabulary as well as pervasive cultural understandings of sexuality and masculinity to make sense of sex and work. Running throughout this text as a theme is the idea of the 'encounter'. The concept of 'touching encounters' highlights the role that interpretive interaction plays in relations between escorts and clients. I argue there are two tendencies in encounters: one towards scripted, role-oriented relations and one towards unanticipated, unforeseen interaction. My conceptualization of commercial sex therefore emphasizes not the identity of the client or the escort, nor the financial aspects of exchange, but the relational and corporeal elements of their coming together. I also apply this conceptualization to encounters between researcher and escort. Given the open tendency of the encounter, the researcher cannot assume that certain bodily gestures and utterances concerning sexuality will be interpreted as intended. Analyzing the creative or otherwise unintended elements of these encounters involves focus on how the scripts that conventionally govern order in sequential processes of interaction can be reorganized. I differentiate between the 'touching encounter' and the 'storied encounter,' the storied encounter being produced through the sharing of narratives post hoc. I demonstrate how this emphasis on encounters and relationality breaks from sexological and psychoanalytical accounts of gender inversion and prostitution, but also how a focus on touching can help reorient queer theory.

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The thought of sexual difference within homosexuality  
has yet to be theorized in its complexity.  
Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter*

Deeply threaded by my prick, he becomes something other than himself, something  
other than my lover. He is a strange part of me which still preserves a little of its  
own life. We form one body, but it has two heads and each of them is involved in  
experiencing its own pleasure. At the moment of coming, this excrescence of my  
body which was my lover loses all tenderness, clouds over. In the darkness, I sense  
his hardness, and that a veil of shadow is spreading over his face  
which is contracted with pain and pleasure.  
Jean Genet, *The Thief's Journal*

Queer maintains its hope for 'non-repetition' only insofar as it announces the  
persistence of the norms and values that make queer feelings queer in the first place.  
Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*

## CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

*I remember meeting a very shy and awkward 30-ish guy for a date over Christmas a few years ago.*

*He was a soldier in the army and had recently returned from Afghanistan.*

*This guy clearly needed to be as far away from that conflict as possible. He wanted some fun in the big city for the weekend before going back up north to see family.*

*We met at his hotel. He was quiet and reserved.*

*In these situations I let them take the lead.*

*I was somewhat uneasy with him at first.*

*After a few beers we both relaxed and ended up just talking and cuddling for hours watching tv with the sound off.*

*At some point he asked me about my fee, and since we were going on three hours, I told him one hour was fine, I was enjoying our time together.*

*He asked me to stay over, which I did. I wouldn't normally do that, but I was drawn to him. He wanted me there by his side.*

*I don't usually fall for geeky army-types!!*

*In the morning, he was distant again but looked me in the eye and shook my hand to thank me.*

*I felt a strange connection to this stoic young man who lived such a different life than mine.*

*I wanted to return the money, but I really needed it for the holidays.*

*On my way out, he said to me (I'm paraphrasing): 'Isn't it strange that our government pays me to kill people and our society accepts it. But if I pay you to make me feel better after I get home from that war, like you did last night, we could both get arrested?'*

*Good point, I thought and smiled before leaving.*

This is Conrad's narrative about an encounter he had with one particular client. Conrad is 42 years of age, but he advertises that he is closer to 30 on the website where his escort profile is posted. Conrad is one of 30 male-for-male internet escorts whose stories I have listened to in interviews. By 'male-for-male internet escorts' I mean men who arrange commercial sexual encounters with other men through specialty websites and email communications.

Male-for-male internet escort narratives are often about touching encounters. By 'touching encounter,' I mean the encounter materializes through two or more bodies coming together, pressed up against one another in cuddling, or sometimes pressed into one another

in sex. Conrad never explains why he walks out the door smiling. Given the details provided in the narrative, it seems that this encounter is not simply about the money. Conrad could be smiling because he enjoyed the sex as much as the soldier did. But the reader cannot tell if the encounter turned to sex. All the reader knows is that the bodies of Conrad and the soldier were touching. By touching encounter I also mean the joint action can be oriented towards people caring or supporting one another through their bodies coming together. Certainly the soldier feels the escort brightened his mood. The escort also describes being drawn in, feeling an intimate bond. Conrad could have walked out the door smiling because making the soldier 'feel better' pleased him. Touching means bodies coming together, and it means being compassionate even if this compassion is somewhat curtailed by the parameters set out by this encounter being a commercial sex affair.<sup>1</sup>

Compared to Conrad's narrative, depictions of men who have sex with men as 'social problems' are far more common. Male-with-male sex and male sex work are often represented according to the classifications that scientists of sex (sexologists, psychoanalysts) set out in their case studies. As Boyer (1989:176) explains:

...the image of the homosexual is one of distorted and exaggerated sexuality, of promiscuity, and deviance. This image has unfortunately been reinforced with public discussion of homosexual lifestyles resulting from the AIDS epidemic.

Wilcox and Christmann (2008:119) add that "the stereotypical image of a male sex worker remains one of a coerced psychopathological misfit who has been sexually abused as a child and is desperate for money". This depiction of desperate men who have sex with men and who sell sex to men is common in social science. For example, research regarding male sex work has focused overly on street workers (e.g. McNamara, 1994; Simon et al., 1994; Boles

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<sup>1</sup> Compensated sex involves exchange of sex for any material item, such as food, clothing, or drugs, whereas with 'commercial sex' I mean payment of money for sexual services.

and Elifson, 1994; Visano, 1991; Luckenbill, 1986, 1985); conflated sexual conduct with sexual orientation assumed to be 'homosexual' (Hall, 2007; Blumstein and Schwartz, 1977; Freyhan, 1947); and, since the 1980s, used epidemiological data to draw a correlation between sexual preference and the transmission of HIV/AIDS (see Aggleton, 1999; Boles and Elifson, 1994; Morse et al., 1992; Morse et al., 1991; Elifson et al., 1991). These depictions of deviance lead to understandings of men who sell sex to men as people at risk of violence, drug addiction, homelessness, and lacking access to health care.

The men I spoke with do not fit this deviant image. Over three quarters had attained or were in the process of attaining a college or university degree. Their average age was just under 35 years, with an average start age of 28 and an average length of 'career' at just over six years. I spoke with men in Montréal, Ottawa, Toronto (Canada), Houston and New York (USA) as well as London (England). One moved from Mexico to the Greater Toronto area to work in the automotive industry before being laid off, another moved to Toronto after growing up in small-town Manitoba, one lived with his parents and worked as a porn star on the side, whereas several others were putting themselves through post-secondary school or were working as an escort to supplement their income. To provide a context for understanding the sex and work of these men, it is first important to know what space has been provided for them in sociological understandings of sex work.

### **Where do Male-for-Male Internet Escorts fit in the Sociology of Sex Work?**

Alexander (1997) argues that commercial sex is a divisive issue. At least three unique sets of feminist arguments have emerged that have shaped the sociology of sex work. The first set of arguments concern sex workers' rights, contending that men and women who sell sex should enjoy the protections that all other workers do. For instance, Pheterson (1989: 26)

argues for “the recognition of prostitute’s rights as an emancipation and labor issue rather than as an issue of criminality, immorality or disease”. From this perspective, people selling sex are conceptualized as performing work and providing a service (Bruckert, et al., 2003; Chapkis, 1997). The selling of sex is one means amongst many of making a living. A second set of arguments conceptualizes sex work as violence against women, which I refer to as the ‘prohibitionist’ camp. Scholars such as Dworkin (1987) argue that performing sex acts for compensation represents an example of how women are commodified and sexually exploited. The ‘prohibitionist’ camp claims that commercial sex is gendered and predicated on exploitative violence (Barnard, 1993; Pateman, 1988), so it should be ended. The third set of arguments are sex radical, contending that sex work is only one element of a broader movement of sexual politics. Many who have contributed to this sex radical set of arguments are sex workers themselves. For instance, Leigh (1997) (also known as Scarlet Harlot) invented the ‘sex work’ term in conjunction with pro-sex work advocacy groups. This sex radical element of feminism contests the criminalization of commercial sex and censorship of sexual expression (see Delacoste and Alexander, 1987). However, Queen (1997) contends that sex radicalism and feminism are not always in bed together, since many feminists argue that gender oppression is the overriding issue whereas sex radicals hold that sexual oppression is a form of domination intersecting with but not reducible to gender oppression. There is an affinity between sex radicalism and queer theory (see Rubin, 1993; Butler, 1990; Sedgwick, 1990) insofar as issues of sexuality are not rendered subsidiary to gender.

Both the sex workers’ rights feminists and the sex radical feminists have initiated legal battles and constitutional challenges to see the federal and municipal laws that criminalize the activities of sex workers stricken down. Sex workers rights’ feminists and sex

radical feminists argue that sex work can be voluntary, although some sex workers' rights feminists put energies into organizing 'exit' programs, which align with prohibitionist goals. These arguments, colloquially referred to as part of the sex wars, are not new (Overall, 1992) and emanate from debates about the so-called white slave trade in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The sociology of sex work did not always exist in Canada. Earlier contributions such as the work of Fran Shaver (1996) and Deborah Brock (1998) created a space for scholars to apply sociological theories and methods as well as understand how commercial sex was constructed as a social problem made subject to moral regulation. Numerous scholars (such as Benoit and Shaver, 2006; Benoit and Millar, 2001; Lowman, 1992, 1990; Gemme and Payment, 1992) have made contributions to understanding on-street sex work. Sex work in Canada is not illegal, but it is not decriminalized either. Though the sex act itself is not criminalized, a number of associated activities are under the *Criminal Code of Canada*, including being found in or keeping a common bawdy house (s. 210), procuring or living off the avails of prostitution (s. 212), and communicating in public for the purpose of prostitution (s. 213). The *Criminal Code* is differentially applied to various commercial sex sectors, targeting female street-based prostitution (Lewis et al., 2005; Weitzer, 2007, 1999, 1991). Yet on-street sex workers are a decided minority – almost eighty per cent of sex workers work indoors (Lowman, 1992). The same legal limbo exists in Britain (see Whowell, 2010). In the USA, laws concerning prostitution vary depending on the state.

What space does this literature concerning sex work provide for understanding commercial sex between men? Feminist debates about commercial sex have focused primarily on women, ignoring the diversity of sexualities and masculinities in male sex work. All sides of the sex wars debate essentialize bodies and identities (see Zatz, 1997; Miklitsch,

1991). Few researchers have focused on male-for-male internet escorts, and those who have are informed by criminology or public health rather than the sociology of sexuality. There is thus a need for empirical studies of various forms of male sex work, as well as theorizing the queer male sexualities and masculinities involved.

There have been two social histories of male-for-male sex work written by Scott (2003) and Kaye (2003). I discuss these works here because they provide an understanding of how male-for-male sex workers have been constructed as social problems, a history that is absent from the abovementioned debates. Scott (2003) argues that, unlike female prostitution, “male prostitution was not regarded as a significant social problem throughout the nineteenth century, despite its close association with gender deviation and social disorder” (pg. 179). Sexology ‘discovered’ male prostitution at the same time it ‘discovered’ homosexuality, toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Young men of the working-class across North America and Europe were involved in prostitution at this time. Some young men chose the street and sex work over the industrial factory’s dangerous labour process (Maynard, 1989). Middle class men fetishized the bodies of the working class, leading to the creation of specialized brothels. Brothels offering young working class men, called peg houses, were closed down in late 19<sup>th</sup> century London under pressure from social and moral hygiene organizations.

After the Second World War, visions of male sex work changed: “It became possible to speak not only of ‘male prostitutes,’ but also of specific ‘types’ of male prostitute” (Scott, 2003:187). For instance, ‘hustlers’ are usually portrayed by sociologists of deviance as young, street-involved and drug-involved men.<sup>2</sup> Towards the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, criminologists became interested in hustling as a deviant career. Psychoanalysts started

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<sup>2</sup> In addition to social scientists, novelists and poets associated with the gay rights movement painted similar scenes of young men selling sexual services on-street. John Rechy’s (1963) *City of Night* is an example.

applying labels and attributing psychopathologies to male hustlers. Enter the gay and lesbian rights movement. The effect of struggles for gay rights strengthened the association of an identity label with same sex relations:

if the ideology of homosexuality brought difficult personal challenges for some hustlers, for others, the rise of gay liberation led toward an increasing acceptance of gay or bisexual self-identity (Kaye, 2003:32-33).<sup>3</sup>

While a preference for so-called 'straight trade' dominated the hustling scene up to the 1960s, a host of different services and venues emerged in a celebration of gay identity: "the gay liberation era marked the first time that the majority of gay men began to buy sex from other gay men, rather than from straight outsiders who lived the bulk of their lives outside the gay world" (pg. 34). A host of new sexual practices emerged out of this ascendance of gay identity. Kaye (2003:37) explains that male prostitution started to move off-street, and "the new social meanings which were applied to male prostitution in the 1960s and 1970s derived from the progressive integration of prostitution into the gay cultural orbit".

The depiction of male sex workers changed again in the 1980s with the emergence of HIV/AIDS. Scott (2003:193) argues that "prior to the appearance of HIV/AIDS, male prostitution was primarily understood as a criminal or welfare issue," but in the late 1980s male prostitutes became objects of epidemiology and were said to be "reservoirs of disease and transmitters of infection from the gay population" (pg. 194). The idea of sex workers as 'risky' has persisted in many public health visions of the male sex worker (see Diaz et al., 2004; Hart and Boulton, 1995; Hickson et al., 1991; McKeganey et al., 1990).

The most recent and consequential development concerning male sex work has been use of the internet as an element of labour process. Independent sex workers, like internet

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<sup>3</sup> This claim echoes the argument of Michel Foucault (1980:220), who writes that those who fight for 'sexual liberation' are "very much caught at the level of demands for the right to their sexuality, the dimension of the sexual, so their work runs alongside discourses of sexuality as opposed to subverting it.

escorts, are better able to control their work, determine cost of labour, select clientele, and consent to work activities. Male-for-male internet escorts do not work for agencies, and are unlikely to hustle on-street or in bars. Whereas magazines and newspaper classifieds were once the best ways to advertise, most advertising today occurs through profiles created on specialty websites. Some sites charge escorts a fee for posting their profile, while others are free (e.g. Canadianmale.com in Canada and Men4rentnow.com internationally). Many of the bodies are advertised as buff and physically fit. Minichiello and colleagues (2008) argue that “the stereotypical image of an effeminate gay persona is challenged by the number of escorts...who display the body image of the hyper masculine body builder and the diversity of sexual practices and sexualities found among these men” (pg. 166). Overall, there are numerous and contradictory visions of male sex work.<sup>4</sup>

How does the sociology of sex work conceive of the ‘work’ of sex work? Building on the sex workers’ rights movement, the influence of labour studies on sex work scholarship has been key in the last two decades. Bruckert and Parent (2006:97) argue that focus on the labour side of sex work allows scholars “to step outside of the traditional criminological analysis of deviance to examine these jobs as jobs”. Such an analytical move allows scholarship to examine sex work as a non-standard form of work. Focus on the labour processes of sex work in Canada (see Jeffrey and MacDonald, 2006; Bruckert, 2002) mirrors international developments in the sociology of sex work (see Bernstein, 2007a; Egan, 2004; Sanders, 2004; Frank, 2002; West and Austrin, 2002; Brewis and Linstead, 2000; Scambler and Scambler, 1997) toward focus on issues such as intimacy and emotions. Some scholars

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<sup>4</sup> Bimbi (2007) argues the literature on male sex work has gone through four paradigms. The first paradigm constructed males selling sex as mentally and physically pathological. The second paradigm categorized males selling sex according to fixed tropes of sexuality. With the HIV/AIDS panic in the 1980s and 1990s, males selling sex were thought of as vectors of disease. The newest paradigm is the sex as work paradigm.

(see Sanders, 2005; Browne and Minichiello, 1995) argue that selling sex requires the surface acting of emotional labour, like any customer service agent might do. Hochschild (2003/1983:35) defines surface acting as 'putting on' a face to socially engineer a feeling for a customer. However, Jeffrey and MacDonald (2006) argue against the view that sex workers have no 'choice' concerning commercial sex, questioning the conflation of service-economy and sex work labour process. Based on research with female sex workers in Canada's Maritime provinces, Jeffrey and MacDonald argue sex work is resistant to service economy labour process (pg. 20). If commercial sex is a way of earning an income without participating in the minimum-wage service sector, then sex work can be thought of as a way of men and women maximizing control over the labour process.

There is still theoretical and methodological room to maneuver in the sociology of sex work, as labour process analysis is limited to consideration of work tasks and client relations, not sexualities, masculinities, or bodies per se. In this text, I try to think outside the boundaries of how work and sex are conventionally conceived. Visano (1987:24) defines commercial sex as "a semi-skilled occupation in which an actor sells or is hired to provide sexual services for financial gain". While sex workers generally share this as a start point, the labour process of sex work is diverse across the industry: some sex workers have little in common as far as labour process goes (e.g. on-street work versus webcam work). Occupations are associated with organizations, unions, contracts, taxes, and licensing. This is why internet escorting is hard to define as an occupation – it lacks these features. And there are many nuances to be explored as it concerns the body, intimacy, and the diversity of sexualities amongst men who have sex with men and sell sex to men.

So far I have reviewed the kinds of stories that scholars have created as it concerns commercial sex. What other kinds of stories can be told about what male-for-male internet escorts do? One of my tasks in this text is to understand how the idea of sex work is made sense of in the stories male-for-male internet escorts share about their working and sex lives. I use the idea of 'sex work' somewhat hesitantly, for reasons that will become apparent when we hear what male-for-male internet escorts say about sex and work.

### **Making Sense of Sex and Sexuality**

The activity of sex is shaped by broader social change, which Giddens (1992) discusses in his comments on the transformation of intimacy. A result of the transformation of intimacy is what Giddens calls decentered sexuality: forms of intimacy not bound by tradition, family, gender roles or custom. Similarly, Bauman (2003, 1998b) argues that postmodern uses of sex are self-sufficiently erotic. Sexual delights are sought for their own sake at one's convenience. Sex is now about orgasm as opposed to social reproduction. One result of these transformations is that there are now a greater number of middle-class people doing sex work. Bernstein (2007a) contends that sex is now "available for sale and purchase as readily as any other form of commercially packaged leisure activity" (pg. 7). This shift is part of what Bernstein calls a move "from a relational to a recreational model of sexual intimacy" (pg. 141). Further inquiry is needed to sort out how these broader social and cultural changes shape the sex and work of male-for-male internet escorting.

One purpose of this text is to tease apart the sex and the work aspects of what male escorts do. I am not contesting the political usefulness of sex work as an idea, but I am stepping back from its focus on decriminalization and labour rights to consider how escorts make sense of their sex and work, and to see how these meanings can inform the way

sociologists theorize connections between sex and work. Drawing on escort narratives, I discuss how the sex and work of escorts is sometimes misrepresented by the claims of sex work scholars. In describing the sex and the work of these men, I emphasize the touching elements of the encounters that male-for-male internet escorts have with clients. My goal is not to discredit the stories that other sex workers, such as on-street workers, tell about violence. But these are not the stories male-for-male internet escorts have shared with me.

Mutuality is argued to be a core tenet of male-with-male sex (Allman, 1999). There is a literature concerning care in male-with-male sex (see Ball, 2003; Weeks, 1995). To touch is sometimes to be tender. But this touching element is not always present. Touching can facilitate care; it can also facilitate the usurpation of someone else's agency. Male-with-male sex is not without its own forms of power and inequity (Valverde, 1985). Power operates in these encounters, especially as it relates to age and body types. To explore these relations further, sociologists need some way of thinking through two tendencies in male-with-male commercial sex: the tendency towards a quick cash transaction and dependence on sexual stereotypes on the one hand, and the tendency towards friendship and mutuality on the other.

I argue that the work of Michel Foucault can help us explore these two tendencies of the sexual encounter. The contributions of Foucault are associated with a rather vague notion of discourse.<sup>5</sup> Readers who know Foucault would agree that there is not only one Foucault; he amended his arguments several times. His *Histoire de la Sexualité* (1978a) is central to this project, and I will explain why. Grounded in genealogical detail concerning how the sexual self came to be 'discovered' and governed with the arrival of secularization, *Histoire*

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<sup>5</sup> For Foucault (1972b), the elements of discourse are not "a set of determinations imposed from the outside on the thought of individuals," nor do they emanate from inside of individual. Instead, the elements of discourse constitute "the set of conditions in accordance with which a practice is exercised" (pg. 208). Sawyer (2002) points out that Foucault's writings cannot be reduced to the idea of discourse.

*de la Sexualité* is a story about the way sexuality and power are conceptualized. Foucault argues that the connection between sexuality and power is not bound by repression. Power operates subtly. I follow Foucault's comments on the irreducibility of power to repression, although I acknowledge that there is a great deal of censorship and domination concerning sexuality (Sedgwick, 2003). Most scholars who have used Foucault are concerned with subjectification occurring in relation to medicine and government – that is, how we come to understand ourselves as types of human subjects. I want to use Foucault to do something else. I want to provide “an understanding of how the forms of discourse become part of the lives of ordinary people...” (Hacking, 2004:278). My project is to make power visible in corporeal and commercial sex relations between men.

My use of Foucault, then, is motivated by Hacking's (2004) call to merge understandings of how subjects are discursively constituted with how they interact in dyadic, bodily encounters. Foucault asks us to see all fixed forms of sexuality as moments of normalization, imposing organization on the body. Foucault is useful in other ways as well, especially in his later works on the care of the self. His later interviews are concerned with erotic relationality as a means of breaking down the categorization regime imposed by discourses of sexuality. This erotic relationality lands us on the terrain of what Foucault refers to as friendship, intense affective relations not governed by ruses of sexuality. Foucault's later interviews regarding friendship as a way of life are key to understanding the touching encounters detailed in the narratives of the men I spoke with.

There are two criticisms against Foucault that I want to presage here that cannot be ignored, one he anticipates and one he does not. The first criticism is that Foucault fails to acknowledge the creativity of sexual encounters. It is often queer theorists (see Dowsett,

1996; Bersani, 1995) who level this criticism. There does not seem to be a playful sex in *Histoire de la Sexualité* (1978a), only an administered sex. I think Foucault anticipates this critique when discussing erotic relationality and friendship as a way of life in his later interviews, though he does not place significant emphasis on this argument.

The second critique, with which I agree, is that Foucault provides only an empty frame of sexuality in which the body is awaiting inscription (Dowsett, 2000). Those who have tried to extend Foucault's analysis into queer theory (Butler, 1990) have likewise been accused of neglecting the materiality of sex. By the materiality of sex, I refer to what Crossley (2007:85) calls the "facts of our bodies". Our bodies sometimes do what they do without our command. To give you an example from the world of male-with-male sex, if a man has not defecated recently and another man is invited to have anal sex with him the first man might involuntarily make a mess all over both bodies. Neither man wants this to happen, but it is a fact of the body that if you try to have anal sex without cleaning up prior to, this can happen. In the words of Harvey, a thirty six year old escort from Montréal, "most people know that if they are a bottom and they want to get fucked they should douche first," but not all men do, especially not closeted men like many of the clients of male-for-male internet escorts. Escorts work on their bodies to make sure such facts of their bodies do not hinder the encounter between themselves and the client. Escorts often come face to face with messy facts of the body when they touch other men. The facts of bodies transform over time through aging; these men must position differently and make diverse uses of their bodies as they age. These men also must manage the appearance of their bodies on the internet where they advertise. In other words, male-for-male escorts must manage their virtual body, plus their actual body and the bodies of others during the encounter.

Touch must enter the story if sociologists want to move beyond treating the body as a discursive effect. Bodies are the basis of touching. For Ahmed (2006:19), bodies are “something touching which is touched”. We acquire habits of touching, a tendency towards repeating touches in certain places, which is a way of communicating with others about how to orchestrate sexual conduct together. But this habitual tendency, this orientation, I argue, can be altered through the course of the encounter. Returning to Foucault, bodies coming together are not simply ‘constituted’ by discourses of sexuality. Most often, it is not tropes of gay liberation or identity that lead our bodies into encounters, be they commercial sex encounters or not. Sexual encounters are themselves creative and productive of meanings attached to bodies coming together. In this text, when I use the word ‘sex’ I am not referring to anatomical difference but activity. Sociologists of sexuality must start with these bodies coming together, their parts and fluids, the interactions between bodies and the meanings produced therein. What I do in this text is flip Foucault’s framework by putting the embodied encounter at the core of sexuality’s productive power.

### **Making Sense of *In Situ* Interactions and Bodies**

How can Hacking’s suggestion that Foucault’s writings be brought to bear on *in situ* interactions and bodies be put to work? Investigating the way that discourse operates in the sexual encounter requires a different scale of analysis, the scale provided by interactionist sociology. Interactionist writings such as the works of George Herbert Mead and Charles Cooley developed out of pragmatist philosophy, and from the earliest contributions have been concerned with the minutiae of human conduct. In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century these pragmatist writings were consolidated into a formal interactionist sociology in the works of Erving Goffman and Herbert Blumer. Hacking (2004) suggests Foucault’s writings should be

connected with Goffman (also see Cahill, 1998). It is possible to draw from Foucault and interactionist sociology together, but I argue Goffman only represents one trajectory of interactionism. Goffman (1959) represents the trajectory of interactionist thought that focuses on roles, rituals and social reproduction at the level of face-to-face interaction. The second trajectory of interactionist thought focuses on breaks, swerves, the unanticipated, new meanings and new practices that are produced out of interaction, theorized by Blumer (1969). There are two tendencies in interactionist sociology, and I argue that both of these need to be put in touch with Foucault. Foucault, Goffman and Blumer appear again and again in this text, because they provide useful conceptual tools for theorizing encounters.

Interactionist sociology itself needs to be supplemented in numerous ways. Some notable proponents of interactionism, especially Cooley, did not place bodies in encounters as much as is necessary for study of sexuality. Some of interactionism's foremost thinkers are accused of being mentalist, stressing the mind too much (Schubert, 2006; Atkinson and Housley, 2003). Interactionist sociology suffers from spontaneism when it fails to account for how meaning-making takes place in material and discursive contexts. And interactionist sociology slips towards subjectivism and qualitative realism when it fails to account for matters of interpretation, elaboration and embellishment (see Denzin, 2001; Snow and Anderson, 1993) in the way people speak and listen to one another during interaction.

As hinted at above, *Touching Encounters* is a piece of queer theory insofar as it displaces identity as a starting point for sociological analysis. Queer theory has a focus on the transgression of sexual/gendered categories. Butler (2004a:42) defines gender as the "apparatus by which the production and normalization of masculine and feminine take place...". Whereas gender studies scholars hold that material inequality between the sexes

overrides issues of sexual diversity, gender was evacuated as a category by queer theory and critiqued as heteronormative. Queer theory also questions the extent to which a gay 'identity' or 'community' is possible. Yet queer theory has trouble moving away from the starting point of identity, insofar as it posits 'queer' as a general identity. Epps (2001:413) points to the irony of this: queer "is consolidated as an identity, perhaps even as an identity to end all identities". In practice, 'queer' is used to represent some identity groups, such as gay men, more than others (Martin, 1997). Queer theory is unclear about what 'queer' means and has assumed that the disruption of identity categories is radical per se (Green, 2002; Halperin, 1995). As part of bringing Foucault's writings to bear on *in situ* interactions and bodies, what can an interactionist approach to sexual encounters contribute to queer theory?

Jackson and Scott (2007) compellingly argue that interactionist sociology helps scholars make sense of the abstract twists and turns that take place within queer theory. Stein and Plummer (1996) also argue that interactionist sociology can help ground queer theory. Whereas with some queer theory the tendency has been to float and theorize above bodies that are sexually engaged, interactionist sociology grounds the analysis back in the encounter. All meanings are constructed through interaction. Meanings do not pre-emanate from psychology or social structure. Thus, interactionism helps us bring the body back into sociology by emphasizing that bodies do not make sense in and of themselves (Crossley, 2006). The lens that interactionist sociology provides is partial – it starts with small-scale interactions – but fundamental insofar as all that is organizational starts with and is achieved through relations happening on the scale of the encounter.

Interactionists have already tried to theorize sex and sexuality. Foremost amongst these contributions are Gagnon and Simon's (1974) discussion of sexual scripts as well as

Plummer's (1995, 1975) work on sexual stories. Both of these approaches emerged during the late 1970s. The idea of a script is a metaphor (Simon and Gagnon, 1986) for the way sexuality is reproduced. Representing the sexual stories perspective, Plummer (1995:34) argues "no longer do people simply 'tell' their sexual stories to reveal the 'truth' of their sexual lives; instead, they turn themselves into socially organized biographical objects". Story telling is sense making. Stories and scripts, however, are two very different concepts. Emphasizing the dramaturgical element of sex, the notion of sexual scripts fosters analyses that highlight the regularity of outcomes as opposed to power and meaning shifts produced by the encounter itself (Plummer, 1982). According to Green (2008:602), scripting theory depicts sexual actors who are less agents actively composing sexual lives and more "wooden puppets who mechanically follow the puppet master—i.e., cultural 'instructions'".

To ground queer theory and bring scripting theory back to its interactionist roots, in this text I argue that the materiality of bodies shakes the encounter away from the set sexual script. In other words, "the body is that upon which language falters" (Butler, 2004a:198). Meanings of sex change at the scale of cultural trends (Bauman, 1998b; Giddens, 1992), but also swerve in the corporeal present. I am not advocating that the works of Gagnon and Simon (1974) regarding sexual scripts be abandoned. Instead I argue scripting theory must be supplemented by emphasizing the unanticipated and touching aspects of sexual encounters.

### **Narrative and Knowing: a Note on Epistemology**

More than a grounded empirical analysis of escort narratives concerning sex and the work, this text is about the sexual stories men tell after coming together. I have conducted interviews with male-for-male internet escorts. I have invited them to share stories with me in prose writing (the story at the start this Introduction is an example). I have drawn from

narrative analysis to make sense of these men's stories and to write a lengthier story drawing them all together. Interview-based data collection is not a clear-cut process, and neither is narrative analysis as a way of working with interview transcripts. I draw from a tradition of qualitative research that emphasizes narrative and interpretation in the way people compose a sense of self and elaborate on the encounters they have with others. The narratives we share with others about our lives are formed through elaboration and interpretation. Elaboration is the process through which past encounters come to life through story telling.

How do the discourses of sexuality that Foucault discusses have a bearing at the level of analysis interactionist sociology is concerned with? I understand discourses of sexuality as proliferating over time and providing a grid of intelligibility that categorizes our relations with one another. The first volume of his *History of Sexuality* is also referred to as *la Volonté de Savoir* (The Will to Know). Confessional animals all want to tell the 'truth' about themselves, argues Foucault. Discourse thus comes to bear on the touching encounters we have with others in these confessional moments. I reconcile Foucault with interactionist sociology by placing touch and gesture at the centre of Foucault's comments concerning productive power and sexuality.

Some might suggest that Foucault's contributions are incompatible with a focus on narrative, interpretation and speech acts. Others might argue that Foucault's level of analysis was abstract and institutional, whereas the level of analysis that interviewing and narrative brings us to is interaction-oriented. Part of this project involves reconciling Foucault's writing on power and sexuality with research methods that are more interaction-oriented. It is exactly Foucault's concern with power and sexuality that needs to be concretized by methodological strategies that have been held apart from his compositions for too long.

Male-for-male internet escorting is in many ways an apt case to bridge these levels of analysis because of the proliferation of discourses concerning sexuality, but also because of the dyadic and interactionist elements of the escort-client encounter.

### **Overview of the Chapters**

To get away from the problems of categorizing and pathologizing these men and their relations – as sexology, psychoanalysis and public health are prone to doing – I have tried to produce a text that swerves as much as encounters between men who have sex with men. Yet attention to instances of touch should not obscure comment on generic social processes. I tell a story that does not lose sense of how sex encounters are socially ordered.

Sexologists and psychoanalysts have a long history of pathologizing men who have sex with men and men who sell sex to men. Part of my project entails casting off the sexological and psychoanalytic frameworks that still mold our thinking about same sex relations. I begin this text by situating my study against other trends in writing about sex and sexuality. After providing a short history of the sexological science of gender inversion, Chapter Two goes on to engage with the recent contributions of queer theory and the less recent contributions of sexual scripting theory (Gagnon and Simon, 1974). These contributions, while important, have limitations.

To supplement queer theory and sexual scripting theory, Chapter Three takes up the relationship between Foucault and interactionist sociology to provide a theorization of encounters. I argue there are two tendencies in Foucault's writings, a closed tendency and an open tendency. The closed tendency is towards deployment of and adherence to discourses of sexuality in the way we touch and the way we narrativize our relations. The open tendency is towards unanticipated, de-sexualized relations as well as friendship (an openness to others).

There are also two tendencies in an encounter according to interactionist sociology, one that is closing and one that is opening. Goffman (1959) accounts for this closing tendency in his comments on roles and rituals, whereas Blumer (1969) accounts for openings in his theorization of symbolic interactionism. A discussion of Mead's 'me' and 'I' helps illuminate these crucial differences between Goffman and Blumer. Drawing from queer theory literature concerning male-with-male sex (see Dean, 2009; Ricco, 2002), I argue that encounters can be itinerant. Those engaging in encounters do not necessarily need to be known by one another in any official or formal way, but are nevertheless together, touching.

There is a discussion of methodological issues in Chapter Four. I comment on my approach to interviewing and data analysis. I discuss some of the limitations of my sample. I also discuss conceptual issues regarding narrative and biography to provide a justification for how I have analyzed male-for-male internet escort narratives.

Chapter Five puts the above-mentioned theorization of encounters into practice through an analysis of my own interactions with escorts during interviews. Goffman and Blumer figure prominently in this chapter as I theorize the interactions between researcher and respondent during interviews. Few qualitative sociologists have considered how men who have sex with men hold diverse understandings of sexuality and how these matter in research encounters, especially as it regards 'touchy' interview topics such as intimacy, intercourse and men's bodies. Drawing from transcripts and field notes concerning interview experiences, I analyze moments where, as the interviewer, I was sexualized by respondents. A first question was often posed to me at the start of interviews: "*are you gay?*" The "*are you gay?*" question not only seeks out a singular identity declaration but also flips over established researcher-respondent roles, indicating that the reflexivity of the respondent is as

important as the reflexivity of the researcher in shaping the conversation to come. My analysis demonstrates why it is important to consider the impact of researcher bodies and speech acts during interviews. Arguing that there are specificities of talk and gesture concerning queer sexualities that researchers must be aware of during interviews, I reflect on how my responses to respondent propositions and sexualization shaped and modified the meanings produced through the research encounter.

In Chapter Six, the reader starts to hear more from escorts' stories about the sex they have and the work they do. I foreground the life history narratives of male-for-male internet escorts while being reflexive about my role in positioning their narratives. Chapter Six explores the sexual stories that these men share, particularly as it concerns aging and the life course. Encounters are biographical, I argue. Encounters shape our understandings of others as well as the stories we tell about our relations. Biography and escorting are interwoven in queer ways, insofar as escorts approach the sex they have at work as part of their overall sex life. The work narratives of male-for-male internet escorts suggest that aging is important for clients and escorts. Talk about aging is talk about one's changing position in the life course. Age-graded sexualities amongst men who have sex with men create divisions between young and old (González, 2007). The aging escort body creates situations where the escort must remarket themselves and face the facts of the body that limit the extent to which the encounter can centre around the supposed sign of virility – an erect penis.

As much as this text emphasizes the relational and non-economic aspects of escorting, male-for-male internet escorting is still very much about work. Chapter Seven is about the work of male-for-male escorts, including entry into the trade, labour process, advertising, payment, and retirement. Numerous scholars have identified the rise of non-

standard work, such as dependent self-employment, as signaling a decline in the salience of work in contemporary society. The importance of labour process theory has also been questioned. This chapter argues that labour process theory (LPT) can help sociologists make sense of what male-for-male internet escorts do. However, LPT must be supplemented to account for the work of the entrepreneurial self-employed and through discussion of how crucial the sexualization of men's bodies has become to some non-standard work. I argue that the labour process of male-for-male internet escorting is individuated, which prevents a notion of the collective labourer from emerging but meshes with the sexual entrepreneurialism required to attract clientele. Because of internet mediation of client booking, there is little communication between escorts, and there is little sense of a collective labourer or solidarity amongst them as workers. Part of the reason why male-for-male internet escorts do not always identify with the idea of sex work is that using the internet to book clients (Castle and Lee, 2008; Ashford, 2006) has individualized the labour process. I reflect on how diversity in the commercial sex industry and the individuated labour process of male-for-male internet escorting point to challenges that sex work organizers face in generating solidarity across the industry.

Some sex work scholars argue that intimacy is feigned in encounters between escorts and their clients (see Sanders, 2005; Oerton and Phoenix, 2001; Browne and Minichiello, 1995). With regard to the sexual stories that escorts tell about their work, Chapter Eight considers the argument that sex workers feign intimacy with clients in relation to Foucault's writings concerning sexuality. The purpose is to explore the connection between sex, sexuality and power in escorting encounters. I contend that these men situate escorting close to their biography, which includes their sexual biography. The sex of their work as escorts is

often the sex of their life. Some male sex workers find their work pleasurable (Luckenbill, 1985), but this does not mean power is absent from the encounter. Drawing from Foucault to make sense of how forms of discourse become part of peoples' everyday lives, I argue there are two tendencies in the encounters that male-for-male internet escorts have with clients. The first is a tendency towards strategic deployment of sexuality and the use of ready-made tropes (e.g. the 'daddy,' the 'twink'). The second is an open tendency towards friendship; friendship as a way of life runs contrary to feigned intimacy. With this open tendency in the encounter, the line between escort-client relations and friendship becomes very thin. These two tendencies are immanent to the encounter, not scripted in advance, such that although there may be a performativity to intimacy shared between escort and client it becomes difficult for the escort to erect a barrier between their 'work self' and 'private self'.

Chapter Nine considers the centrality of the body and body work in escorting, reflecting on what escorts' have to say about the use of their bodies, the bodies of clients, as well as HIV/AIDS and health issues. In the words of Valverde (1985:29), "to think and talk about sexuality is first of all to think and talk about bodies". Sociologists are not accustomed to talking about the centrality of body fluids to one's work in sociology, such as, for instance, the meaning of semen in sexual encounters. Semen has significance for understandings of masculinity (Moore, 2007). But in a sexual encounter the smell and touch of this substance is integral. Social scientists are still hesitant to consider the way bodies come together during sexual encounters. I argue that male-for-male internet escorting is a form of body work that requires body reflexive practices generated out of concern for and the touching of other men's bodies. Body reflexive practices lead to kinds of self-surveillance and composing of the body towards certain ends. I discuss how racialized bodies are valorized in this economy

of pleasures and touching. I also argue that male-for-male internet escorts negotiate health risks as part of their work in an embodied manner, through touching or 'feeling it out,' even with men who have HIV/AIDS or sexually transmitted infections. It is not only the materiality of the escort body that changes because of the work; the meanings of men's bodies also change.

In addition to reflecting on the importance of stories in social science, the Conclusion considers how situating analysis of escort and client relations in the encounter invites social scientists to reassess how sex and work are interwoven. *Touching Encounters* is meant to be a seductive story, but also a persuasive story. The pleasure of a text for the reader is not guaranteed, and so I must 'cruise' in slow circles to draw the reader in. As Dean (2009:xii) puts it, the "principal virtue of cruising is to initiate contact with strangers". I am not telling this story to undermine the idea of sex work, or to undermine the efforts of sex workers and their allies who have struggled for safer working environments. Rather, I supplement understandings of how one particular kind of sex work happens, and explore its continuities and discontinuities with other forms of work as well as its continuities and discontinuities with other kinds of sex. I hope to diversify the kinds of stories one can tell through the coupling of 'sex' and 'work'.

## CHAPTER TWO – VISIONS OF SEXUALITY AND SEX WORK

This chapter offers an overview of how sexuality and sex work have been conceptualized from sexology through to queer theory. I begin by examining the works of Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis, moving on to look at Sigmund Freud's partial break from sexology. In the sexological and psychoanalytic writings I review below, sexuality is assumed to be congenital, instinctual or propelled by innate drives. My critiques focus on Krafft-Ebing, Ellis and Freud since their works continue to buttress many essentializing claims made about same sex acts (Brickell, 2006; Irvine, 2003). I then argue that even the sociology of sexuality and sex work have tended to start with fixed notions of sexual identity, gender identity, and a sense of pleasure that corresponds to these identities.

Sexuality studies were once limited to sexological and psychoanalytic frameworks. Foucault (1978a) identifies psychoanalysis in particular as the knowledge machine that ties sex to drives, pathologizing bodies and pleasure. The mid-20<sup>th</sup> century was a time of social change concerning the recognition of same-sex relations, for instance the *Criminal Code of Canada* was amended to decriminalize private 'homosexuality' in 1969. The Stonewall riots in June of 1969 galvanized the growing gay and lesbian rights movement. Through the 1970s, the field of gay and lesbian studies legitimated sexual orientation and identity as social science topics. Nevertheless, gay and lesbian studies continued to operate with a "potentially normalizing" notion of sexual identity (Dean and Lane, 2001:7; Wilkerson, 2007; Glick, 2000) that sometimes reduced gender to anatomical sex (Butler, 1997).<sup>6</sup> In part to address this limitation, queer theory emerged in social science during the mid-1990s (though it started earlier in literature and film studies). Queer theory as a concept was

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<sup>6</sup> Seidman (1993) also notes that gay and lesbian theory was not a coherent project until after groups like Gay Liberation Front and Queer Nation had lost their effectiveness on the social movement scene. Many women had already left the groups because of the 'malestreaming' of many organizing efforts.

introduced into scholarly discussion in 1990, at a conference organized by Teresa de Lauretis. Queer theory as a literature is argued to differ from gay and lesbian studies insofar as the former holds that identities are contingent and power permeates all social relations, interrogating how desire is ordered instead of assuming that a gay or lesbian identity is natural (Gammon and Isgro, 2006; Valocchi, 2005; Jagose, 1996). Yet queer theory has not permeated the discipline of sociology. As Gamson and Moon (2004:48) argue, sociology is “resistant to what had initially been a humanities-based intellectual enterprise; complaints abounded about queer theory’s tendency to understate the role of institutions in sexual regulation [and] to overstate the benefits of category-deconstruction”.

Despite its subversive potential, queer theory has not escaped the tendency towards reifying identity (Jagose, 2009; Noble, 2006; O’Driscoll, 1996). Numerous authors (Jackson and Scott, 2007; Stein and Plummer, 1996) argue that queer theory must be supplemented through attending to the interactionist elements of sexual encounters. Chapter Two critically reviews developments in queer theory to provide a context for conceptualizing the ‘encounter’ in Chapter Three. I conclude by arguing that the interactionist writings of Gagnon and Simon (1974) on sexual scripts anticipate the arguments of queer theorists, but push analysis to focus on the habitual rather than creative elements of sexual conduct. Repositioning of scripting theory offers a starting point for theorizing the touching encounter.

### **Theorizing Sexuality and Sex Work – Looking Back**

#### *The Invert: from Sexology to Freud*

Sexology dominates lay understandings of male-with-male sex (see Anderson, 2005; Kaye, 2003; Adkins, 1997; Dowsett, 1996). Sexology’s chief invention – the category of ‘homosexuality’ – still frames the way male sex work and all sexual practices deviating from

monogamous, heterosexual and procreative sex are understood (Green, 2002; Rubin, 1993). It is important to retrace sexological writings regarding gender inversion, since the idea is still a powerful imaginary that shapes public views of same sex relations.

Prior to the rise of sexology in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, sperm was believed to be a magic fluid. There was a spermatic, excretory economy, in which sperm was thought best not squandered (Thompson, 2007). Libidinal energy had to be sublimated since sperm was thought to contain the essence of life. It was argued that men should “judiciously conserve” their sperm if they were to compete in the marketplace (pg. 113). Moral panics regarding masturbation and prostitution were driven by this nerve to preserve. Sports were promoted as a way of fostering discipline in the spermatic economy (Burstyn, 1999). The copulative and excretory body was treated as a body of excess, a messy body, certainly not a body in accord with the masculine, controlled body of the stereotypical worker.

Projects of regulation regarding masturbation and female reproductive tracts were based on this idea of a spermatic economy and the careful management of excretion (Barker-Benfield, 1972). Too much use, too large and too constant a flow was thought to lead to mental derangement that jeopardized one’s financial prospects. Self government aimed towards containing sexual eruptibility was crucial for creating a capitalist habitus, “sturdy manhood” was thought to be lost with too much ejaculation, and sperm had to remain “souped up to a particular level of richness” in order for a man to deliver on his familial obligation (pg. 50). Assumptions about men’s bodies and sperm were interrelated to the way women and their bodies were conceived. Women were thought of as “sperm absorbers” (pg. 55), and gynecology developed to ensure that absorption was occurring at a rate suitable to child bearing and the project of family. This notion of a spermatic economy is, certainly, the

backdrop upon which sexology enters the stage. How would sexologists characterize men who ‘wasted’ their semen on other men, or men who were paid to have sex with other men? The answers are: inversion and other pathologies of sexuality.

Krafft-Ebing’s (1886) *Psychopathia Sexualis* became a point of reference in sexology, informing all sorts of expert and lay understandings of sex and gender.<sup>7</sup> The root cause of sexual pathologies for Krafft-Ebing, as with the spermatic economy, is auto-eroticism: “nothing is so prone to contaminate – under certain circumstances, even to exhaust – the source of all noble and ideal sentiments, which arise of themselves from a normally developing sexual instinct, as the practice of masturbation in early years” (pg. 189). The idea of inversion remains a commanding metaphor framing how sexuality and gender are imagined. Of inversion, Krafft-Ebing wrote:

...the essential feature of this strange manifestation of the sexual life is the want of sexual sensibility for the opposite sex, even to the extent of horror, while sexual inclination and impulse toward the same sex are present...this abnormal mode of feeling may not infrequently be recognized in the manner, dress and calling of the individual, who may go so far as to yield to an impulse to put on the distinctive clothing corresponding with the sexual role in which they feel themselves to be (pg. 221).

This sexological understanding of inversion assumes that gender roles are natural, and that mimicking them through forms of talk, dress or sexual practice is against nature. One must be vigilant against inversion since “there is always the danger that homosexual feelings, in that they are the most powerful, may become permanent, and lead to enduring and exclusive

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<sup>7</sup> Krafft-Ebing used the name of Masoch to designate perversion. That perversion has now been linked with another perversion, sadism, in what is thought of commonly as a kind of super perversion, sado-masochism. Sadism “is the experience of sexual pleasurable sensations (including orgasm) produced by acts of cruelty, bodily punishment afflicted on one’s own person or when witnessed in other, be they animals or human beings” (Krafft-Ebing, 1886: 53). Masochism, on the other hand, is the “wish to suffer pain and be subjected to force” (pg. 86). Masochism is said to be “being completely and unconditionally subject to the will of a person of the opposite sex” (pg. 86). Krafft-Ebing borrows the name of de Sade and Masoch to invent these pathologies of sexuality, yet “sadism and masochism exhibit totally different forms of desexualization and resexualization” (Deleuze, 2006/1967:134), meaning Krafft-Ebing’s designations of perversion are misleading.

antipathic sexual instinct” (pg. 232). Inversion is conceptualized as a contravention of conventional sex and gender rules. The invert is described as alien: “in cases of completely developed inverted sexuality, heterosexual love is looked upon as a thing absolutely incomprehensible; sexual intercourse with a person of the opposite sex is unthinkable” (pg. 253). “Prevention of onanism and removal of other influences injurious to the sexual life” as well as “mental treatment, in the sense of combating homosexual, and encouraging heterosexual, feelings and impulses” (pg. 299) are deemed the only methods useful in dealing with inversion, since “castration is out of the question...to confine such people in an insane asylum is a monstrous idea” (pg. 306).

Krafft-Ebing’s account of inversion was extended by Havelock Ellis (1897). For Ellis, “the sexual invert may be roughly compared to the congenital idiot, to the instinctive criminal, to the man of genius, who are all not strictly concordant with the usually biological variation” (pg. 134). The segregated school system is pointed to as a primary cause of inversion. Seduction of young men by older homosexuals is another cause, which produces “a taste for homosexuality” (pg. 139). Disappointment in ‘normal’ love is the third purported cause. For Ellis, the invert is a congenital failure who is spurned towards abnormal sexuality by homosociality, homoerotism, or the failure of heterosexual subjectification. Ellis (1910) does discuss male commercial sex. He writes:

...the prevalence of homosexuality has led to the existence of male prostitutes...the definition must be put in a form irrespective of sex, and we may, therefore, say that a prostitute is a person who makes it a profession to gratify the lust of various persons of the opposite sex or the same sex (pg. 225-226).

According to Ellis, prostitution arises in every society where early marriage is difficult and intercourse outside of marriage is socially disapproved. He describes the “semi-official toleration” that enabled authorities to become a part of the brothel system in medieval

European, which effectively outlawed “unlicensed prostitutes outside” (pg. 249). This system of registering and examining prostitutes, says Ellis, “is obviously so urgently necessary to combat the flood of disease and misery which proceeds directly from the spread of syphilis and gonorrhea, and indirectly from the prostitution which is the chief propagator of these diseases” (pg. 250). From Ellis, the English world receives sexology’s definition of the prostitute and the designation of sexual pathologies. Ellis repeats Krafft-Ebing’s account of inversion, and applies sexology to the case of prostitution. This notion of inversion presupposes that sexuality is congenital and can be examined through locating the indicators of pathology.

One difficulty with sexological literature is that it offers a clinical language and fails to historicize sexuality. Failing to historicize sexuality blinds one from seeing how our understandings of sex are changing rather than immutable, situation-specific rather than driven by nature. Gagnon (2004a) argues even ‘progressive’ sexology like the work of Kinsey amounts to a taxonomy, a charting. Kinsey was important in shifting the conceptualization of sexuality away from claims about innate drives to matters of taste and habit. Deeply influenced by the natural sciences, however, Kinsey believed sexuality reflected the diversity of nature, which his six-level scale aims to represent (see Gagnon, 2004c). Sexological research has “continued to attempt to reduce homosexuality to a set of characteristics of deviancy and manifestations of psychic and biological damage to be somehow repaired and rendered inoperable and noncontagious” (Dowsett, 1996:32). Sexology and its “interrogation into the abnormal” (Brooks, 2006:34) has little sociological relevance, since it is a quest to classify and contain the so-called invert/pervert constructed through case studies and interventions.

In Freud's (1962/1905) *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* we find an account that does not reduce gender and sexuality to biology. Freud was skeptical about attributions of degeneracy in inverts since "inversion is found in people who exhibit no other serious deviations from the normal...it is similarly found in people whose efficiency is unimpaired, and who are indeed distinguished by specially high intellectual development and ethical culture" (pg. 25). He also breaks from sexology's understanding of sexuality as being hard-wired: "it is even possible to doubt the very existence of such a thing as innate inversion" (pg. 27). Freud provides a different definition of inversion than Krafft-Ebing and Ellis, one that rejects congenital explanation and breaks from understanding gender and sexuality as tied to the spermatic economy. Freud challenges the idea that gender roles are fixed by sex:

...a large proportion of male inverts retain the mental quality of masculinity...they possess relatively few of the of the secondary characters of the opposite sex and that what they look for in their sexual object are in fact feminine mental traits. If this were not true, how would it be possible to explain the fact that all prostitutes who offer themselves to inverts – today just as they did in ancient times – imitate women in all the externals of their clothing and behavior? Such imitation would otherwise inevitably clash with the ideals of the invert (pg. 32).

Lust is not, for Freud, simply a matter of the congenital. What makes Freud important in this context is that he tries to understand sexuality as relational. Masculinity and femininity can be detached from men and from women because gender (in this case, for the 'inverted' or male-for-male prostitutes) is a matter of imitation and fantasy. Because of this potential for imitation, Freud argues that all human being are capable of making the homosexual object-choice (Dean and Lane, 2001). Freud opens up a different discussion of sexuality in relation to the masculine and feminine, since drives are not conceived of as governed by body fluid levels or an evolutionary force but are recast as narcissism (Dean, 2001; Bersani, 2001).

Freud is certainly not as heteronormative as the clinical and atheoretical psychoanalysis that followed him, especially in America. While Freud makes a partial break from sexology and is the “first pluralizer of homosexuality” according to Bersani (1995:104), what is problematic about Freud is that this claim about gender and sexuality comes with some conceptual baggage. This baggage is the phallus. “The masculine genital zone of the glans penis” (Freud, 1962/1905:122) is said to be the leading erotogenic zone in men. Freud’s theory of character, family and symbolism is built around this claim. Extending Freud’s insight, it is Lacan (2006) for whom the phallus is a model for the causal principle of desire. After deconstructing sexology, it makes little sense to pin a whole theory of sexuality back onto the symbolic relevance of one single body part. Yet, with focus on the phallus, this is exactly what has happened.<sup>8</sup>

I also hesitate to claim that Freud marks a break with the ultimate referents of sexology instead of simply recasting them in the language of psychoanalysis. For instance, de Lauretis (1993) suggests Freud re-positions a notion of normal sexuality in his vocabulary of tensions and drives, which renders inversion as a fixed, abnormal form. Grosz (1994) points out that drives, for Freud, resemble instincts. Gagnon and Simon (1974) also start from abandoning the focus on drives in Freud. Foucault (1972a) views psychoanalysis as the offshoot of 19<sup>th</sup> century psychiatry and medicine insofar as “Freud’s role in psycho-analytical knowledge” (pg. 233) has created a whole new gamut of sexual pathologies to intervene

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<sup>8</sup> Dean (2000) argues that “Foucault’s critique ends up reobscuring distinctions between psychoanalysis and psychology, as well as between psychoanalysis and psychiatry” (pg. 3). While my characterization of the phallus would perhaps be described by Dean as “Foucault-inspired antipsychoanalytic orthodoxy” (pg. 4), in Dean’s own attempt to show how psychoanalysis sheds light on the normalization of sexual expression he argues that “it is purely conventional and therefore...arbitrary that the phallus should hold any indisputable priority” in the symbolic realm (pg. 50). For Dean, “the phallus as Lacan’s model for the causal principle of desire may be bracketed” (pg. 50). However, Dean’s purpose is to understand what role the unconscious plays in the normalization of sexuality, so replaces the symbolic relevance of the phallus with Lacan’s other key concept, the object. My purpose is to understand what role touching plays in the production of discourses concerning sexuality, so I require a materialist and interactionist framework, hence my parting from the phallus.

upon. Freud's account of male-with-male sex is based in cultural logic of heteronormativity, and a case study method that pathologizes through categorizing confessions (see Brooks, 2006; Stein, 1989). Freud treats sexuality as if it can explain everything; it is sexuality that requires explanation.

### **Theorizing Sexuality and Sex Work – Looking Forward**

If biomedical sexology and Freudian psychoanalysis offer visions of sex and male sex workers that are problematic insofar as they cast same sex relations as pathological, fixing sexuality in a way that renders it predestined, some other theoretical basis is needed for understanding sex and sexuality. A psychoanalytic framework relegates sexuality to the realm of fantasy and symbolic relations, overlooking the realm of corporeality and touching. I argue that queer theory and interactionist sociology can help conceptualize the ongoing conversation of gestures and confessions that sexual encounters are made up of.

Before certain critical interventions in understanding same-sex relations (such as McIntosh, 1968), sexology and psychoanalysis were the only formats for telling stories about men having sex with and selling sex to other men. McIntosh's article on the homosexual role was one of the first scholarly works to situate sexuality in a field of social relations rather than taking it to be a natural ingredient of the individual. The work of scholars such as Kinsey and McIntosh helped form gay and lesbian studies. To be sure, gay and lesbian studies, as well as queer theory in the 1990s, offer a significant challenge to sexology and psychoanalysis. But there is a trend in some gay and lesbian studies to treat sexuality as a permutation of gender – if two men are together those men are gay, if two women are together they are lesbians (see Dowsett, 1996). Queer theorists argue that sexuality and gender are not reducible to one another, and sexuality should not be assimilated to gender in

analysis. Queer theory, associated with theorists such as Sedgwick (1990), Butler (1990), Rubin (1993) and Young (1994), contends that changes in the gender order can only emerge through a radical change as it concerns sexuality. For instance, Butler (2004a:16) argues that “sexuality does not follow from gender in the sense that what gender you ‘are’ determines what kind of sexuality you will ‘have’”. Young (1994) argues gender is not a self-evident basis for making claims about identity. In the following section, I review what I consider to be some of the more recent pivotal contributions in queer theory, examining the strengths and weaknesses of these writings as a way of looking forward with theorizing sexuality and sex work. My purpose is not to provide a comprehensive review of queer theory but focus on generative themes that have recently emerged that will assist in my conceptualization of encounters. Instead of dwelling on discursive effects as queer theory does, I contend that sexuality is constituted through touching and in some ways it can undo discourses of gender and sexuality through corporeal contact.

### *Much Ado about the Phallus*

One debate that has been central to queer theory pertains to the phallus. The phallus symbolically represents the universality of male dominance. However, positioning themselves against Freud’s and Lacan’s conceptualizations of the phallus, Deleuze and Guattari (1983:351) argue the phallus is a “despotic signifier” that no one possesses. What I suggest is that preoccupation with the phallus is itself a product of heteronormative understandings of sex and gender relations, which privileges the symbolic to the neglect of the material realm. Preoccupation with the symbolic power of the phallus eschews how power operates in corporeal and commercial sex relations between men. If a materialist focus is allowed to supplant the emphasis on symbolism, then the debate about the symbolic power

is replaced by a concern for physical bodies. In other words, when the materiality of the penis is given precedent over the symbolic phallus, and when the material body is conceptualized as fallible, the depiction of men's bodies as impermeable is thrown into question.

Criticizing this idea of a universal phallus, Stephens (2007) argues that a key strategy of various feminist scholars, especially psychoanalytic feminists, is to focus on the phallus, which effectively privileges the symbolic over the material. The male body is envisaged as clean, lean and linked to authority. But this construction of the male body, argues Stephens, requires a disappearance of the actual penis. Claims about male power vis-à-vis the phallus are not tangible because the corporeal specificity of the penis is not considered. Put another way, the irony is that “the ubiquity of the penis is maintained by its cultural invisibility” (pg. 86). Likewise, Grosz (1994:198) argues “the specificities of the masculine have always been hidden under the generality of the universal”. Emphasizing the importance of the symbolic phallus creates an essentialist category of ‘male,’ which fails to provide a basis for investigating how power operates between men. Focusing on the penis destabilizes traditional notions of masculinity that associate the masculine body with domination, or at least emphasizes that power operates within sexual communities of difference as well as between them. A more complex understanding of male-with-male sexuality is required to deconstruct the privileged masculine subject of classical sociological theory and show how conventional categories of ‘men’ as gendered and sexual beings are essentializing.

For a long time, sociologists separated sex and touch from sexuality, but numerous scholars (see Wilson, 2010; Berlant, 2009; Green, 2008) now emphasize the need to account for the somatization of sexuality. When the materiality of the penis comes into view, sociologists can theorize the male body as a permeable entity. As I argue in Chapter Six,

there are inequalities between men, and there are inequalities between men who self-identify as gay. Inequalities are established along many lines with these men, age and body type being some of the most significant. Stephens' (2007) point is that actual bodies need to be central in sociological claims about sexual encounters, and that consideration of the aging body is informative for understanding how sexualities change over the life course.

### *Sex-Positive?*

If the materiality of bodies is accepted as a legitimate and important topic of inquiry, does this mean sociologists should celebrate sex? This question has already received considerable attention in queer theory. As previously mentioned, queer theory has a different agenda than gay and lesbian studies. Queer theory focuses on the disruption and transgression of norms. For instance, Queen (1997:134) argues it is time for sex workers to “become ambassadors for sex and gratification”. However, pro-sex discourses are not destabilizing per se. Glick (2000), for one, challenges the sex-positive focus on transgression in feminist and queer discourses. Glick is not for or against sex or particular sexual styles, but argues that scholarly analyses cannot be limited to celebrating “the politics of genderfuck” (pg. 20). By continuing to make sexual conduct the issue, Glick argues pro-sex scholars are engaging in a “project of personal sexual liberation” (pg. 22). Further, Glick indicates that a problem emerges insofar as “pro-sex theory has set up transgressive sexual practices as utopian political strategies and, in the process, has inadvertently endorsed the emancipatory sexual politics that its Foucauldian supporters meant to overthrow” (pg. 24). Foucault was critical of identity politics and even the gay and lesbian rights movement, precisely because these movements reified identity. One difficulty with the pro-sex position is that it revalues stable sexual identities as a basis for making claims about liberation. A second difficulty is

that sex radicalism posits a kind of free-floating sense of desire that is easily aligned with consumer capitalism (Blackman, 2009; Kirsch, 2001), collapsing politics into personal style. A third difficulty is the “defensive refusal” (Martin, 1997:109) by some sex radical queer scholars to consider how discourses of sexuality are related to the gender order.

Like Glick, O’Driscoll (1996) is hesitant to embrace pro-sex discourse and is even tentative about the notion of ‘queer’. ‘Queer’ is used to reference a subversive identity, but it can also be used as an anti-identity critique. Queer theory itself is a rather ambiguous entity, and one reason it has not cohered into a stable literature is this ambiguity concerning its object of analysis. One critique here is that queer theory’s questioning of identity undermines the visibility and political space of representation that gay and lesbian studies tried to open up. As O’Driscoll (1996:35) notes, “confusion arises between sexual transgression and sexual identity partly because gender and sexuality...are so closely linked as to be almost inseparable”. Because of this confusion, O’Driscoll argues the idea of ‘queer theory’ should be relegated to the domain of gay and lesbian studies, of ‘gay theory’ and ‘lesbian theory,’ since ‘queer’ cannot be teased out from identity (also see Talburt and Rasmussen, 2010).

Given the overlap between matters of sexuality and issues of gender, this argument about the limits of queer theory also has implications for how scholars conceive of gender in the masculinities literature. For Garlick (2003:156), “research into men and masculinities has failed to seriously engage with some central insights of queer theory”. Sociologists have focused too much on gender, which is based on a male/female binary, and the study of masculinities has only been an extension rather than a subversion of this binary. Garlick problematizes the idea of ‘male’ as a base for theorizing gender relations:

If we are to seriously engage with the central tenets of queer theory, then it behooves us to ask to what extent concepts such as ‘masculinity,’ ‘man,’ and ‘male sex’ are

reliant on the institution of heterosexuality for their coherence...the assumption that biological 'sex' forms a stable, unchanging basis on which the cultural production of gender works is one that appears increasingly untenable (pg. 157).

A limitation of the masculinities literature is it fails to understand how the language of men and masculinities depends on a heteronormative understanding of male sexuality: "the failure to problematize the construct of the 'male sex' has led to much attention being given to the notion of 'masculine sexuality' and the way it is expressed through sexual intercourse, without consideration of the way this concept is reliant on heterosexuality" (pg. 158).

Heterosexuality produces this sense of universal masculinity (Richard, 2007). Materialist feminists also point out that acknowledging gender domination does not de-universalize masculinity or acknowledge inequality between gays and between lesbians (Jackson, 1999).

Pro-sex discourses, then, tend to offer an identity-affirmative conceptualization of sex acts, rather than situating touch in relation to power. Sexuality and gender are constructed together, performed together, and so must be deconstructed together. Leaving pro-sex and its attendant identities behind, and focusing instead on touch as an extension of power relations, I argue that that the touching encounters we have with others can undo our sense of self, reorienting senses of sexuality as well as gender.

### *The Performativity Paradigm*

Judith Butler is one queer theorist who has articulated a vision of the relation between gender, sexuality and politics. She has also written extensively on power and bodies. Butler's influential accounts of gender and performativity are elaborated in *Gender Trouble* (1990) as well as *Bodies that Matter* (1993). In *Gender Trouble*, Butler (1990:6) writes that gender does not stem neatly from supposed sex categories: "presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation to gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex

or is otherwise restricted by it". A male/masculine versus female/feminine binary compels subjects towards recognizing themselves as being one or the other gender. Internal coherence of either pole "requires both a stable and oppositional heterosexuality" (pg. 22). The human subject, for Butler, is bound by what Foucault (1978a:98) calls "the rule of immanence". The subject cannot exist outside of power; power is part of all relations.

A 'performative' is a practice of improvisation within a field of power. When Butler comes to the section of *Gender Trouble* where she gives sustained attention to the performativity analytic, she draws from Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*. Foucault (1977:149-156) demonstrates how mechanisms of domination were supplanted by offering the body up to new forms of regulatory knowledge, or, in Butler's (1990:134) words, how prisoners were made "to compel their bodies to signify the prohibitive law as their very essence, style, and necessity". These corporeal signs interest Butler because, when it comes to gender, it is these performative gestures that "create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion maintained for the purpose of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality" (Butler, 1990:136). Gender is performative rather than expressive; there is no essence to be expressed.<sup>9</sup>

Butler provides scholars with tools for debunking biological determinism, but her work has been critiqued based on its implications for agency, the subject, and the body. Some accuse Butler of obliterating the sexed body (Stein and Plummer, 1996:137; Pringle, 1992), while others argue that she exaggerates the internal uniformity of gender norms (Cover, 2004b; McNay, 1999). Further, the possibility of subjects intervening in their own

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<sup>9</sup> In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler (1993) reconceptualizes performativity as citationality to show that the reiteration of gender norms is always incomplete. If performatives provisionally succeed, it is because the "action echoes prior actions, and accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices" (pg. 227).

constitution is not developed, and the broader forces that compel us towards performatives are glossed over (Seidman, 1997).<sup>10</sup> Weeks (1998:128) argues that Butler does not “adequately account for the forces that induce our practices,” and that her focus on discourse eschews the contexts in which people interact. Lloyd (1999:210) similarly argues “one of the weaknesses of the concept of performativity...is that it is comprehensible primarily as an account of individuation” which ignores the context of interaction. In general, cultural feminists are accused by material feminists of reducing the body to discourse and making a fetish of non-identity (see McNay, 2004). Butler’s concept of performativity is indispensable to queer theory, but it must be supplemented through consideration of the context in which corporeal interaction takes place: the encounter.

Butler’s performativity concept is not designed for analyzing the multiplicity of subject positions played and reiterated by men who have sex with men. Cover (2003) notes the partial collapse of compulsory heterosexuality that has given rise to diverse signifying economies not necessarily governed by the heterosexual matrix. Gender must be split off from sexuality, as Butler achieves, but sexuality should not be reduced to binaries. The performativity paradigm, then, has eschewed the multiplicity of sexuality (by reducing it to the heterosexual matrix – where heterosexuality and homosexuality are the only options) as well as the materiality of sex in touching encounters. The performativity of sexuality is not an individual effort, but is a joint action, requiring touching encounters between two or more persons. While the notion of performativity does make use of Foucault to understand how power operates on our sense of self in a gendered manner, it is not explicitly intended to theorize encounters, as interactionist sociology is.

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<sup>10</sup> West and Zimmerman (1987) have also been critiqued for ignoring bodies in their account of doing gender. Butler’s comment on ‘doing gender’ differ from the work of West and Zimmerman. The latter come from the ethnomethodological tradition and do not adequately account for the intersection of gender and sexuality.

The relationship between sexuality and stereotypes is key to understanding performativity. Gay and lesbians are argued to comport a number of stereotypical kinds of bodies that correspond with gay and lesbian masculinity and femininity (Cover, 2004a). Gay and lesbian performatives produce the illusion of a fixed subject. Discourse relays the stereotype that is materialized through performatives. In this sense, Dowsett (1996:267) argues “gay communities are constantly manufacturing gayness”. The transformation of gay and lesbian movements into markets (Sender, 2004), into the so-called pink economy, has shaped gay and lesbian relations by fostering sexual stereotypes. According to Gamson and Moon (2004:57) “understandings of and attitudes about sexuality are both affected by and reflect global political-economic phenomena such as commercialization”. More research is required to understand how the stereotypes and discourses of the so-called pink economy become part of the touching encounters of men who have sex with men.

A key issue that I explore further in Chapter Seven is how the performativity paradigm has failed to investigate the way performatives of gender and sexuality are generated out of work and labour process. Queer theory can be aligned with a materialist lens to focus on the performativity of intelligible and recognizable sexual stereotypes as a necessity of coherent labour and consumption practices (Cover, 2004b). To be a coherent worker, one must offer coherent identities, especially sex and gender identities. Male-for-male internet escorting is an apt case to explore how bodies are compelled towards coherence in working contexts, primarily because of the centrality of the body to escort work. Sociologists can conceptualize sexuality and gender as performative within an economic context, and launch queer theory into debate with other research trends in sociology such as

the sociology of work and labour process theory. Chapters Six through Eight explore sex and sexuality in relation to the work of male-for-male internet escorting.

To summarize the foregoing discussion, O'Driscoll (1996) argues that scholars should have some trepidation about the notion of 'queer' since it can reproduce an emphasis on identity. Stephens (2007) adds that research should focus on the materiality of bodies, while Glick (2000) contends that pro-sex discourse is limited. Cover (2004b) argues queer sexuality is performative, but occurs in the context of labour and consumption. These arguments provide a basis for moving beyond sexology and psychoanalysis. Yet numerous authors (see Green, 2007a; Dunn, 1997) have noted that queer theory is best conceived of as an extension of interactionist approaches to sex and sexuality, which I turn to next.

### *Sexual Scripts*

Gagnon and Simon's (1974) *Sexual Conduct* was one of the first sustained considerations of sexuality to draw from interactionist sociology. Gagnon and Simon anticipated much of what queer theory has recently attempted because, with their scripting theory, identity is not treated as fixed but as something precarious that must be constantly achieved, and sexual interaction is argued to take place in a specific context (Jackson and Scott, 2007). What an interactionist approach to sex and sexuality adds is that the specificity of the body and its gestures in interaction becomes the focus.

As a statement against biologism, the idea of sexual scripts was influential in the sociology of sexuality starting in the mid-1970s. These scripts, Gagnon and Simon (1974) argue, are organized in two ways. First, each actor brings with them conventions that govern sexual acts. These conventions are culture-bound. The scripts order comportment. Second, Gagnon and Simon suggest the script must be accepted to produce arousal. If the script is

rejected, the sexual act can fail to proceed. What sexologists assumed for so long to be biological behaviour Gagnon and Simon argue is a social process of meaning-making. The authors also claim that the idea of scripting is in debt to the study of drama, since this scripting happens on different stages. The idea of sexual scripts detaches sex from biology and emphasizes its social character. For Simon and Gagnon (1986) the significance of action (sexual or not) is constantly achieved by people interacting.

Some authors regard sexual scripts as “blueprints” for sexual behaviour, detailing with whom one will have sex and how (Markle, 2008). Laumann and Gagnon (1995:190) argue sexual scripts are culturally specific “instructions” for sexual conduct, including the ‘who, what and when’ of sexual conduct. For Wiederman (2005:496), “social scripting theory rests on the assumption that people follow internalized scripts when constructing meaning out of behavior,” such that “scripts provide meaning and direction for responding to sexual cues and for behaving sexually”. Other authors (see Rye and Meaney, 2007) suggest if scholars could change the script perhaps numerous societies would achieve sexual equality. Mutchler (2000) argues that all forms of sexual activity between men can be conceived of as a sexual script. Commercial sex is a script. Unsafe sex is a script. Sexual violence follows a script. All of these authors assume people internalize sexual scripts, as if people simply take on scripted roles that are waiting for them. This notion of sexual scripts has also influenced the sociology of sex work (Sanders, 2008, 2005; Browne and Minichiello, 1995), which has implications for how sex work scholars understand the sex of sex work.

Jackson and Scott (2001) argue the interactionist idea of sexual scripts is useful as a way of grounding the claims made by queer theorists, but does not adequately explain how culture provides the contents of scripts. Also, Gagnon and Simon’s notion of the script only

accounts for recognizable types of sexuality based on stereotypes and conventional settings of sex. The script is said to be enacted (read: existing prior to the encounter) rather than transmuted through the act of touching. Analysis of sexual scripts has moved away from the interactionist level of analysis it started with towards a sexological concern for cataloging behaviour.<sup>11</sup> The consequence is that meaning-making has been de-emphasized, and the importance of bodies to encounters has been downplayed. Scripting theory now assumes relatively stable patterns of sexual interaction. Though not as unpredictable as park cruising or tearoom trade, I argue that with itinerant sex between client and escort the evading of patterned interaction in favour of something unscripted is often the aim. For this reason, I supplement sexual script theory by emphasizing how there is an open tendency in encounters between escorts and clients. What is produced out of the encounter is as, or perhaps more, important than the script going in.

As one of the first interactionist scholars of sex, Plummer (1982) long ago argued that to put all the emphasis on scripts or roles is to ignore more open meaning-making tendencies in sexual encounters. The script is not given in advance by culture; the sexual script, if it comes to be followed at all, must be produced out of the encounter, out of participants learning what they can do with their bodies together. Sociologists need not point to an abstract notion of culture to decipher sexual scripts. Instead of assuming the sex of the encounter is given in advance by some overarching notion of culture, I argue that the touching during encounter itself can produce meanings of sexuality. The notion of sexual scripts is useful as a challenge to biologically reductionist accounts of sex, but I emphasize the unanticipated elements of sex encounters, how scripts mutate through gestures and touch.

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<sup>11</sup> In this sense, Gagnon (2004a:275) argues “I think we lost control of it [scripting theory]”.

By an unanticipated element of the sexual encounter, I do not mean the idea of being ‘swept off one’s feet’ as per the Western idea of romantic love. Beyond the novelty of kinky sex, what I am arguing is that the escort and the client sometimes form a relation moving in directions that neither of them anticipate prior to their time together. Simon and Gagnon (1986) acknowledge this unanticipated element of sexual encounters, insofar as they argue sex occurs on a continuum between improvisation or “the excitement of uncertainty” and a more closed tendency towards a predictable “sexuality of reassurance” (pg. 118). While notions of romantic love and monogamous partnership have become a part of younger communities of men who have sex with men, especially with the emergence of same-sex marriage (Warner, 1999), there are still forms of sexual practice between men oriented towards encounters that stray from sexual scripts.

The relations of many men who have sex with men are not tied to the script of monogamy. The idea that men who have sex with men have ‘problems’ developing long term relationships evinces that a ‘til death do us part’ script is at the centre of how many social scientists conceive of intimacy, sex and the self (see Slavin, 2009). Does scripting theory resonate with short sequences of surprising interactions between two strangers who come together, offer the warmth of their bodies through fleeting caresses, and then part ways as if they will never meet again? I have suggested above that it does not. The sociology of sexuality requires a conceptualization of the two tendencies of the encounter, which I provide in the following chapter.

## **Conclusion**

The following is a summary of the propositions offered in this chapter:

1. Sexology and psychoanalysis are problematic because of the notions of fixed identity and innate drives at the root of their claims.
2. Queer theorists contend that scholarly analysis cannot start with the question of identity.
3. Bodies need to become central in sociological claims about sexual encounters.
4. Gender performatives involve and are conditioned by performatives of sexuality, which often occur and are made sense of in local contexts of work and consumption.
5. Sexual scripts exist. But there is a specific logic to sex work encounters between men based on anonymous sociality and itinerant spatiality. Sociologists must expand their theorization of sexuality and sex work to make sense of these anonymous encounters.

There is no a contradiction between the last two propositions: that gender and sexual performatives are compelled towards coherence by work and consumption at the same time that the erotic encounter always involves an unpredictable element. These are the two tendencies of an encounter, one that is closing and one that is opening, one towards repetition and one towards difference. If sociological analysis does not start from identity, but from the assumption that interaction can be generative of new meanings and ways of bodies coming together, the sociology of sexuality can be positioned away from abstract starting points, and move with the contingency of corporeal encounters.

### **CHAPTER THREE – THEORIZING ENCOUNTERS**

In Chapter Two, I borrowed from queer theory to question the utility of identity as a conceptual starting point in the sociology of sexuality. The notion of a ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ identity or a totalizing queer community is problematic because of how arbitrary the boundaries of community are (Valverde, 1989). There is too much congruence between fixed notions of gay and the regulatory medical discourses of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century sexology and psychoanalysis (Green, 2007a; Gamson, 2000). The sociology of sexuality should not start by presuming sexually united subgroups, as sexology does. Yet queer theory itself focuses overly on discursive effects and not enough on touching, too much on the radical potential of sex itself and not enough on work and consumption. Noble (2006) goes so far as to suggest that we are now in a “post-queer” conjuncture, insofar as the word “queer” no longer signifies the plurality of possible ambiguous gender and sexual performatives. The word “queer” can also circumscribe the existence of power differentials within communities of sexual difference. My suggestion is that the sociology of sexuality move toward theorizing ‘encounters’ as an alternative starting point, especially as it regards examples involving itinerant sex where the body is given over to a stranger.

Earlier I suggested that reconciling the works of Foucault with interactionist sociology may provide a fruitful way of thinking through the two tendencies of the sexual encounter. This chapter takes up that task. Ian Hacking (2004) has argued that the texts of Foucault and Goffman can be used to complement one another. This argument is provocative because Hacking asks us to reconcile Foucault’s writing about power/knowledge with interactionism’s material focus on what people do. Foucault is concerned with how knowledge operates in discourse, whereas Goffman is concerned with face-to-face exchanges

and conversation. Missing from Foucault is “an understanding of how the forms of discourse become part of the lives of ordinary people, or even how they become institutionalized and made part of the structure of institutions at work” (pg. 278). Missing from Goffman is “an understanding of how the institutions he described came into being, what their formative structures are” (pg. 278). However, integrating the works of seemingly dissimilar scholars is a challenge, as it is not certain if these thinkers can be reconciled epistemologically.

There have already been attempts to recast Foucault’s comments regarding discourse and sexuality. In the last chapter, I argued that Butler’s focus on performativity has not effectively brought Foucault down to the level of the encounter; the performativity paradigm eschews the materiality of sexuality in favour of analyzing instantiations of gender. Hacking argues Foucault needs to be brought down to the level of the dyadic encounter. To do so, I argue, we must use interactionism to understand the way discourse is translated through gestures and touching during the encounter. Discourse does not simply manufacture a subject who becomes a ventriloquist for discourse, but is in part produced and modified by those whom it operates on. Bodies translate discourse through their imbrications with others. Rather than a sexed body, one that is discursively constituted, we have a sexing body, which through its reflexive and creative gestures transmutes discourse during the encounter.

Foucault’s writings regarding sexuality can be brought into conversation with interactionist sociology, but Goffman does not provide us with all the tools we need to discuss interaction. Goffman was influenced by British anthropologists indebted to Durkheim (Collins, 1986). Goffman’s focus on role and rituals represents only one tendency of thought in interactionist sociology. To account for more creative and open tendencies in the meaning-making process, sociologists must consider Blumer’s work. Castellani (1999) suggests that

Blumer can be used to supplement Foucault, which is my intent in this text. Foucault examines how we operate upon our selves as selves but puts less emphasis on the influence of our interactions on others and vice versa. Castellani argues Foucault is negligent when it comes to the improvised and indeterminate swerves that encounters can take. It is these swerves that Blumer can help make sense of. Foucault must be brought into conversation with a more interactionist level of analysis, as Hacking suggests, which requires a conversation with Goffman and Blumer that occurs here and in Chapter Five.

There are two tendencies in an encounter: a closed tendency and an open tendency. The closed tendency is towards ordered and expected interaction. These expected interactions are governed by the roles and rituals that Goffman theorizes so well. This closed tendency is one of repetition or “sedimentation of corporeal style” (Diprose, 2002:120). Conversely, the open tendency is towards unanticipated meaning-making and bodily practices. These breaks or swerves are the processes of interaction that Blumer theorizes. This is a tendency towards difference, “openness to otherness” (ibid.) or coming together otherwise. Chapter Five and Chapter Eight explore these two tendencies of the encounter.

I delimit my discussion of the encounter to sexual encounters, although this conceptual framework has ramifications for interactionist sociology more broadly. As mentioned in Chapter Two, sexual scripting theory does not emphasize unanticipated meaning-making or bodily practices involved in sexual interaction, and places too much weight on the script leading up to the encounter, neglecting how the script breaks down and becomes altered through the touching of bodies. Scripting theory does not allow for analysis of what is unanticipated in encounters. I conceptualize the encounter itself as productive of sexuality and as a site of potentially unanticipated eroticization. This is where Foucault re-

enters the story. While the theory of sexual scripting operates with too broad a notion of culture, Foucault (1978a) allows a more detailed discussion of how discourses of sexuality frame the way people think of their relations with others. What discourses of sexuality achieve is the imposition of a particular, repeatable form of conduct on what would otherwise be (and continue becoming) multiplicity. If discourses of sexuality constitute a subject, I argue, the constitution of the subject takes place in part through touching.

This Chapter is organized in four parts. First, I put Foucault, Blumer, Goffman and Mead in conversation together, distilling from their work a conceptual scheme for understanding the two tendencies of the encounter. Second, I discuss how bringing Foucault to bear on the encounter requires insight from the sociology of the body. The bodies in Foucault's writings are never very fleshy, nor do the subjects in Foucault's writings seem to have much of a say about the discursive formations that shape their understandings of their relations. Third, I discuss the similarities and differences in how Foucault and interactionist sociologists define power. I conclude by discussing how this conceptualization of the open and closed tendencies of interaction relates to itinerant sex, or the specific logic of the lure in male-with-male sex where the body is given over to a stranger.

### *Foucault, Sexuality and the Encounter*

In the *History of Sexuality Volume I* Foucault (1978a) breaks apart the idea that we 'have' a sexual identity. Foucault (1983:203) tells the reader that his writings are concerned with the processes through which "we make ourselves subjects". What I take from Foucault is his focus on sexuality as a mosaic on which people strategically place themselves in power relations, as well as the way Foucault discusses desexualized relations (or eroticism anew). A

thicker exegesis of his work, including his distinction between *ars erotica* and *scientia sexualis*, is offered in Chapter Eight. Here I outline what I take from Foucault for this text.

For Foucault (1978a), desire is not repressed. Instead, desire is joined with power in an impetus to confess the truth about one's self and thereby take pleasure in knowing a truth.<sup>12</sup> The clinical setting is the confession's site, par excellence. Foucault indicates that the confession leads to a form of pastoral power, where those who listen to the confession attempt to guide the soul of the storyteller towards certain ends. Sexuality is constituted through the desire to speak about it, which is why Foucault argues we need to change the way power is conceptualized. Power has always been equated with the law, the sword, the sovereign, and the juridical. Moreover, power has always been equated with a negative relation, a negation, instead of a positive relation, a production. Power has been reduced to "the procedure of the law in interdiction" (pg. 86), which emanates from an association of power with the monarchy and then the state apparatuses or juridico-political system. "The representation of power has remained under the spell of monarchy" (pg. 88), writes Foucault.

Foucault's (1978a) project is to provide insight into power beyond prohibition and sovereignty. He conceives of sex not in terms of repression or law, but in terms of power, which he defines as "the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization" (pg. 92). Power exists not in a central point, but "comes from everywhere" (pg. 93) in complex strategical situations. It follows that power can always be resisted; there is always another action upon an action.

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<sup>12</sup> Stories are not always confessional - there needs to be affirmation of a particular kind of self in order for the story to be a confession (Valverde and White-Mair, 1999). Valverde (2004) also points out that confessional practice today does not always aim towards a single, coherent gendered or sexual identity claim, which is consistent with the focus on contrapuntal narratives that numerous authors interested in story telling and social science have developed (see Doucet and Mauthner, 2008a; Doucet, 2008; Plummer, 1995).

Historicizing sex and sexuality has consequences for how we understand desire.

Foucault's interviews offer a less genealogical vision of sexuality and are more normative.<sup>13</sup>

For instance, Foucault (1997b:144) argues "the whole conceptual scheme that categorizes homosexuals as deviants must be dismantled" (pg. 144), and this is not because of heterosexual repression. It is because male-with-male sex has become predictable, determined by identity: "the sexual act has become so easy and available to homosexuals that it runs the risk of quickly becoming boring, so that every effort has to be made to innovate and create variations that will enhance the pleasure of the act" (pg. 151). Pleasure is important in Foucault's schema, but not because of hedonism. There is a criterion: pleasure evades categorization. The reason that Foucault rejects Freud is because Freud views knowledge of sexuality as discovering a hidden truth, whereas for Foucault the will to know is part of a will to power. Foucault continues (1997c) by arguing that the contemporary gay rights movement needs the art of life more than the science of sexuality.

What does Foucault say about the touching of sex itself? "Sex is not a fatality: it's a possibility for creative life," argues Foucault (1997c:163). By 'creative' I take Foucault to mean that the actual doing of sex is not something that is always prefigured. In a sense, Foucault holds out that resistance to sexuality needs to account for the way we touch one another. Foucault associates pleasurable sex with new relational possibilities, though these possibilities are as yet unknown. For instance, Foucault equates bondage with new possibilities of pleasure, "a creative enterprise...the desexualization of pleasure" (pg. 165). The conflation of pleasure and sex is broken down, and "very strange parts of our bodies" are

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<sup>13</sup> Foucault's writings and interviews that came after *History of Sexuality Volume I* put more emphasis on the self and friendship. My rationale for including Foucault's interviews as part of his corpus is that, as Deleuze (1998:115) suggests, Foucault's interviews "extend the historical problematization of each of his books into the construction of the present problem, be it madness, punishment or sexuality". His later interviews, conducted when at work on the uncompleted *Confessions of the Flesh*, also come closest to talking about touch.

introduced into our relations with one another. These parts are 'strange' because these touching encounters are often anonymous.

Sex and sexuality are, for Foucault (1997c), an issue of ethical practice. If people believe some act must conform to their identity, then "they will turn back to a kind of ethics very close to the old heterosexual virility" (pg. 166). Today "sexual ethics imply very strict truth obligations," which leads to the need to be "constantly scrutinizing ourselves as libidinal beings" (Foucault, 1997d:182). But erotic relationality runs counter to the deployment of sexuality. Erotic relationality can operate as a moment of itinerant pleasures, bodies without the power/knowledge connection implied by sexuality. In this sense, "pleasures open bodies to worlds through an opening up of the body to others...queer pleasures put bodies into contact that have been kept apart by the scripts of compulsory heterosexuality" (Ahmed, 2004:164-165).

On one hand, Foucault is critical of sexuality as a homogenizing discourse. On the other hand, Foucault holds out that there might be something ethical about sex. What is ethical about sex is friendship. Friendships between men entail a bond that is neither based on familial relationships nor conventional masculinity per se. The relations possible through friendship do not run alongside the deployment of sexuality, though they are not exactly an organized resistance to it either. An interesting case is the friendships that some male escorts develop with clients (see Chapter Eight). The touching encounters of escorts and clients are often organized according to discourses of sexuality, but at other times the touching can turn to relations not based primarily on sexual identity categories.

How can Foucault's understandings of power and sexuality be made useful for understanding the dyadic encounter? There are two similarities between Foucault and

interactionists that Hacking (2004) does not mention. First, both Foucault and interactionists reject the question of identity as an ontological starting point. They both start with the question of the self as a project. Here I mean the later Foucault, from 1975 onward, not the earlier structuralist Foucault. Second, Foucault and interactionists employ a similar definition of power. Both start from the assumption that power is not definable simply in the negative (e.g. when it is exerted through force) but that power is also productive and refers to the ability to produce an effect in some network of relations.

While there is space in *History of Sexuality Volume I* for understanding the deployment of sexuality as achieved through everyday confessions, Foucault does not take interaction as his object of analysis. Hacking (2004) suggests Goffman can be used to bring Foucault down to the level of the encounter, whereas I suggest it is not possible without Blumer. Goffman operates with a notion of interaction rituals that in many ways limits what the outcome of interaction can be. Blumer puts more emphasis on the unanticipated aspects of interaction. This is why Hacking misleads us with his suggestion that Goffman can help concretize Foucault's claims concerning the effects of power.

Most scholars are unaware of the extent to which Blumer differed from Goffman as it regards theorizing the encounter; there are few documented exchanges between the two intellectuals. We find one of the only commentaries offered by Blumer concerning Goffman's work in a 1972 book review. Blumer argues that Goffman's contributions are useful insofar as he "forces us to see order" (pg. 50) in the way people comprehend and respond to one another. Blumer emphasizes that Goffman conceptualizes interaction as patterned and rule oriented. Interactions are ordered not as a simple matter of obedience; people have developed skills at reestablishing order after an infraction of norms. For Blumer,

Goffman's focus on interadjustment and rituals "distorts" (pg. 52) the interactionist tradition, inasmuch as Goffman only emphasizes impression management. Goffman's is a "one-sided treatment" of the self that "sets up a static world" argues Blumer (pg. 53), since only focusing on patterned and ordered interactions "shuts out consideration of how norms and the patterned adaptations to them either come into being or deteriorate and pass away". These are the only comments Blumer offers on Goffman's work. Yet the review clearly explains the differences between the two: Goffman took individual efforts toward order maintenance and impression management as his object, while Blumer was more focused on what is produced out of the interaction or how the terms of the encounter are always being struck anew.

For Goffman (1959), we act to maintain a given definition of the situation.

Obligations bind people to fashion their conduct in an expected, approved manner (Goffman, 1967). Any contingency must be managed, or else we could lose face. Interaction that exceeds the given definition of the situation must be realigned. It is Blumer, I argue, who conceptualizes the open tendency of the encounter, the tendency towards creativity.

This idea of two tendencies in the encounter can be further explained by situating the work of Goffman and Blumer in relation to Herbert Mead, the pragmatist thinker who is largely credited with creating the foundations of the 'Chicago school' of interactionist sociology. Goffman and Blumer, as is well known, draw upon Mead, although the two authors make very different uses of him. The differences between Goffman and Blumer can be clarified through Mead's (1967/1934) language of the 'me' and the 'I'. The attitude of the 'me' is the attitude of the generalized other. The 'me' takes the role of the other, and is therefore "a conventional, habitual individual" (pg. 197). This is a closed tendency of interaction insofar as it "controls the response of the individual" (pg. 154). The 'me' is the

strain of thought Goffman emphasizes. Goffman subtracts the creativity of interpretation from Mead's interactionism. In contrast, the 'I' "reacts to the self which arises through the taking of the attitudes of others" (pg. 174). Blumer could be accused of individualizing and subjectivizing Mead insofar as he fails to treat the individual as an abstraction from the group (McPhail and Rexroat, 1979). Whereas the 'me' is oriented towards fulfilling a habit, repeating the tendency of others as part of the self, the 'I' is an "action over against that social situation within his [sic] own conduct". The 'me' is associated with the closed tendency, the tendency towards taking the self as others would, whereas the 'I' is associated with the open tendency, the tendency towards taking one's relations as a creative project.

For Mead, 'I' and 'me' are abstractions for discussing operations of a social group upon self. The individual acts as part of wider assemblages of social process; the subject is its own object but only insofar as the self is compelled, urged, moved, in relations with others. Mead (1967/1934) does not focus on consciousness or inner experience. This is where he differs from Cooley<sup>14</sup> as well as from phenomenologists. Conduct is Mead's primary object of analysis. However, it is not conduct post hoc but conduct *in situ*, as it happens, that is Mead's concern. Further to this, Mead is concerned with what conduct does, not conduct in and of itself but conduct as one of many situated gestures and forms of communication. What I want to do is extend Mead's focus on gestures across the chasm of individuals into the space where their bodies come together: touch.

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<sup>14</sup> Mead (2008/1902) is critical of Cooley since Cooley reduces interaction to "an affair of consciousness" (pg. xxiii). The difficulty with Cooley's approach, according to Mead, is that "the action of the others upon the self and of the self upon others becomes simply the interaction of ideas upon each other within the mind" (pg. xxx). In this sense, Cooley is a mentalist, whereas Mead's theory focuses more on gesture. Influenced by psychoanalysis, Cooley (2008/1902) also tends to pathologize interaction, arguing the "the human mind is indeed a cave swarming with strange forms of life" (pg. 263) leading to maladies.

For Mead (1967/1934) language includes gestures, “the attitude of the body” (pg. 14), the way bodies mean through movement. Mead does not ask why people gesture to one another, but is instead interested in the dynamic effects of gestural conduct. The conversation of gestures is how people create meaning together; meanings are translated by the conversation of gestures. This does not mean gestures are read as intended. In fact, Mead suggests intentionality is a false problem, because in reading others in our interaction with them we “translate these gestures into significant symbols” (pg. 55). The gesture (or the touch) must be made sense of, which is a creative act. There is no sole tendency towards repetition, because the interpretation of acts requires translation of meaning. We often take the role of the other, “which is a tendency to act as the other person acts” (pg. 73). And in this sense our conduct is adjustive to the conduct of others – this reference to ordered interaction is what Goffman takes from Mead. We also have the ability for reflexive consideration of the present in relation to the future as well as the past. For Mead, meaning is “not to be conceived, fundamentally, as a state of consciousness,” since consciousness is assumed to be static while gestures are dynamic. Gestures imply meaning-making in action – this reference to unanticipated effects of interaction is what Blumer takes from Mead. One makes meaning through “a process of intercourse with those about him” (pg. 107). An interactionist account of itinerant male-for-male sexuality takes this last statement literally.

The self, for Mead (1967/1934), is constituted or “arises” (pg. 144) through encounters. There is no self prior to encounters, instead “there are all sorts of different selves answering to all sorts of different social reactions” (pg. 142). The illusion of a complete self is broken into multiple selves. For Mead, consciousness is a static state. Interaction has no time for consciousness. The changes in our actions as result of interpreting the gestures of

others are aleatory insofar as “we shift from what we started to do because of the reply the other makes” (pg. 141). The ‘I’ is associated with “a creative expression of embodiment” (pg. 222). The open tendency exists insofar as “the response of the ‘I’ is something more or less uncertain” (pg. 176). Elements of the encounter elude anticipation: “however carefully we plan the future it always is different from that which we can pre-visualize” (pg. 203). Without this open tendency of the encounter, “there would be nothing novel in experience” (pg. 178). Every encounter offers an “incalculable quality” (pg. 217) to its participants.

There are no individual selves for Mead (1967/1934), only selves in conduct together, composed together. Therefore, Mead’s interactionism is not a form of subjectivism. He explicitly argues he wants to “avoid the implication that the individual is taking something that is objective and making it subjective” (pg. 188). Here I pose three questions to bring interactionist sociology into discussion with Foucault.

The first question regards touch and discourse. If discourse involves touch and is translated by touch, does discourse not provide a ‘me’ to gauge one’s interactions in relation to some definition of a situation? The translation of gestures into meaning that Mead discusses is vital to single out because it refers both to how discourse translates (converts) the self into a particular recognizable type of self (e.g. a ‘straight’ self, a ‘gay’ self) and how discourse translates (conveys) meaning in a proliferating economy of touching bodies. Here we do not have selves ‘constituted’ by and through discursive processes as suggested by some iterations of queer theory, but encounters that create certain conditions for gestures and the imbrications of bodies to translate selves as well as transmute and proliferate discourses.

Second, Mead (1967/1934) argues the subject is always enmeshed in what he calls “social control”. Mead defines social control as “the expression of the ‘me’ over against the

expression of the 'I'" (pg. 210). Is this expression of social control not similar to what Foucault referred to as subjectification? In the realm of sexuality, the expression of a sexual 'me' (the closed tendency) over and against the 'I' (the open tendency) is what Foucault would call a ruse of sexuality, a running alongside the discourses of sexuality. If, however, the creative and unanticipated possibilities of the open tendency were not checked by rituals and habits, one result could be the different economy of bodies and pleasures Foucault emphasizes as contra the categorization regime of sexuality.

Third, it is important to frame these two tendencies of encounters in terms of how the sexual encounter is governed. If "discourse about sexuality [is] a contemporary frontier of the policing process" (Hutton, 1988:136), and self-control rather than repression is the means through which discourses of sexuality proliferate, another crucial question emerges: in touching encounters, who are the police? This answer is, potentially, both men involved, as it all depends on what tendency holds sway in the homo-heterogeneous ensemble.

Reconciling Mead's language of 'me' and 'I' with Foucault's discussion of discourse and sexual subjectification would create a queer Mead indeed: a Mead that allows us to understand the mutable gestures that make up sexuality; a Mead that has no time for identity or consciousness because his ontology of interaction moves with the creativity of the open tendency of the encounter; and a Mead who debases any fixed sense of the self and demonstrates how senses of self and all meaning is continually accomplished. This Mead could exist alongside a Foucault who views the discourses of sexuality as proliferating and operating upon bodies; situates the body as a nodal point of power; and who, like Mead, identifies two tendencies in encounters. There still remain some difficulties in reconciling Foucault with an interactionist approach. Foucault is anti-humanist insofar as he argues

humans are not unmediated makers of meaning. In his view, the introduction of humanist approaches to social science further entrenched certain political interests by reinforcing categories deployed in processes of governance. My argument mirrors Foucault's cautions concerning representational practices and voluntarism. It is the subjectivist tradition in interactionist sociology that needs to be broken down (Bastalich, 2009), since the subjectivist tradition stresses mentalism and voluntarism instead of the encounter.

Despite all that is useful in Foucault for understanding encounters between escorts and clients, in Chapter One I argued that Foucault needs to be supplemented when it comes to theorizing encounters, theorizing homoerotic bodies, and understanding how conventional sexual scripts are undermined. Foucault does not explicitly address interactionism (hence Hacking's call for someone to do something creative with Foucault and bring him down to the level of the encounter). With some help from other theorists of sexuality and interaction, I argue that Foucault's writings can help us make sense of our most touching encounters.

### *Homoerotic Bodies*

Foucault analyzes how sex is put into discourse. I am interested in the inverse problem: how discourse is put into the doing of sex. Sexuality is aligned with power in distinct ways for Foucault, but he does not provide us with a thick description of the ways power operates on bodies or the ways bodies operate in encounters.<sup>15</sup> People accuse Foucault of a "bleak kind of cultural and social determinism" (Allen, 2000:116), and though this is not

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<sup>15</sup> The call for bodies to reenter discussion with Foucault has also come from prominent feminist scholars. There is said to be a productive tension between Foucault's understanding of power and that of feminists since both identify the body as a nexus of power, both view power as local but non-localizable, both emphasize discourse, and both criticize privileging a universal theory of the subject (McLaren, 1997). Munro (2003) argues that thinking of sexuality as infused with power is what Foucault and feminists have in common. I am interested in whether Foucault and consideration of homoeroticism can fit within what has been called the big tent of feminism (see Stacey, 2005; Rosenberg and Howard, 2005). Thinking about power and homoeroticism should be a concern for feminists, since what is at stake is a critique of the universal male subject (Stephens, 2007).

entirely the case, Foucault does not provide us with an embodied human subject. While there is space in *History of Sexuality Volume I* for understanding sexuality as articulated through bodies, Foucault does not discuss the material particularities of bodies or what Crossley (2007) calls facts of the body. In his later interviews, Foucault suggests there is something specific about the way men relate to one another erotically, but he does not develop this further. That Foucault's analysis of bodies is incomplete requires some substance be added to the skeleton he provides concerning the relation between sexuality and corporeality.<sup>16</sup>

To get closer to sex while keeping in mind Foucault's comments regarding the sexual mosaic and subjectification, sociologists must focus on the body. Dowsett (1996) argues "an insidious form of heterosexism has emerged to rid research of an analysis of sexuality, as a multidimensional structure of power and praxis affecting all lives, as a product of iterative cultural production, an accumulation of experiences and meanings" (pg. 34), which leads to the neglect of what bodies do. Dowsett asks that scholars reject the "plea for respectability" (pg. 36) in most public health research on sex; these approaches eschew the body by reducing it to a set of indicators, erasing how people perform sexuality and gender (also see Parker 2009). Bodies have specificities that are vital to consider when talking about pleasure: "a prostate is a prostate and uniquely male" (pg. 37). Dowsett wants this materiality of sex to be present in sociological analysis. Dowsett (1996) argues scholars must be concerned with bodily practices when it comes to sexuality research, or else gender and sexual performatives are treated as norms. Dowsett critiques the 'norm' as an object of social science:

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<sup>16</sup> For Merleau-Ponty (2008/1945), touching aims to connect bodies in space. Foucault rejects phenomenology because of its focus on consciousness and intentionality. Likewise, I am less smitten with intentionality, and more interested in touching as the very basis of productive power. I think the ontology that Mead provides to interactionism is not the same as the phenomenological starting point, and while I believe the former can be reconciled epistemologically with Foucault to a certain degree I do not believe the latter can. One possibility, however, for attempting to read them together if one were so inclined would be to consider what Merleau-Ponty says about the body as a work of art with what Foucault writes regarding the self as a work of art.

A norm is simply a social 'biopsy' performed at a given moment, which is then frozen for later examination, the body (politic) having moved on...the norm is a concept that ignores the actuality of domains of contested power operating in the structuring of relations in any society (pg. 43).

The same argument can be made about sexual scripts. Scripting theory moves beyond Freud's reliance on the phallus as an ultimate referent, but the script must freeze meaning to analyze it, and meanwhile the touching bodies have moved on. Giving attention to the specificity of bodies in male-for-male sex encounters illuminates the ways that erotic relations are irreducible to procreative, monogamous, heterosexual conventions.

Performing gender and sexuality is a way of configuring the body and composing the self. To understand how sexuality operates in the encounter, sociologists must be attuned to what people are doing with their bodies together. While Dowsett's (1996) call for humping and pumping bodies to be present in scholarship is important, in Chapter Nine I explore the extent to which sociologists can assume similarities across homoerotic bodies.

### *Problems of Power*

Male-for-male internet escorting is not all about men indulging in the ambiguous pleasures of bodies coming together. Power operates in these touching encounters between men. There is a convergence between Foucault's notion of power as the ability to produce an effect and interactionist accounts of power. For Foucault and for interactionists, power operates and flows in actual situations and shapes the course of ongoing interaction (Dennis and Martin, 2005). Power is immanent to relations; power does not stand outside of any set of relations but circulates through them, acting on actions (Foucault, 1983:220). Nonetheless, it is strange to discuss Foucault alongside interactionists because Foucault's method and writings seem to efface the human subject. Hacking's (2004) proposition to merge Foucault

with interactionism is provocative, but he does not address how to sort out some differences between the way Foucault and interactionists think about power, people and interaction.

Given their interest in bodies and ongoing sets of relations, interactionists are best situated to study power as it works in the everyday lives of people. Yet many scholars harbour numerous myths about interactionist thought. These myths must be dispelled if interactionism is to be put into conversation with Foucault. According to Prus (1999), the first myth about interactionism is that it only concerns the subjective realm. To the contrary, given the emphasis on relations and interactions, interactionists do not think of the self as disconnected from others and start from the premise that people are interconnected and engaged in particular settings. The previous discussion of Mead makes this clear. Another myth is that interactionists are only interested in 'micro' sociology. This claim is not entirely accurate. Interactionists argue we can only begin to understand broader social organization through comprehending how it is generated out of interactional 'here and now' sequences.

Prus (1999) defines power as the ability to shape or define a situation. To analyze power according to an interactionist approach, sociologists must turn attention towards the way people define situations and how these definitions shape the course of interaction. People usurp the agency of others in these sequences of interaction, and these attempts at usurpation can be resisted. With sex, the ability to define certain bodies or certain actions as allowable or pleasurable evinces power at play. Insufficient in this account is the fallback to a voluntary subject or a 'tactician' approach to negotiating power in particular contexts. Prus suggests that people in interactions are tacticians who attempt to work towards their own advantage or the advantage of their allies. Prus refers to this as "influence work" (pg. 169). The work of influencing others is the work of creating a definition of the situation that

induces and compels others to see it the same way. Part of the work is scripting to develop credibility and legitimacy as a person others should go along with in defining the situation.

Prus falls into the same sort of trap that he argues interactionism can avoid: he reduces meaning-making to the tactical decisions, bargains and decisions of one participant. Prus, then, could potentially be accused of subjectivism. Part of why Prus over-emphasizes the tactical is that he is interested in the particular subject of gambling and dice hustling, which demands tactics. This is not to deny that there is a tactical element to power relations at the level of interactionism, but, given the open tendency, even strategy and tactics do not secure predictable futures in interaction. It is the encounter itself, not either individual, then, that is the architect of power relations.

Foucault's discussion of power, sex and sexuality is not consistent either. At the same time Foucault discusses strategical situations, there seems to be no subject, no doer behind the deed (Butler, 1990). Butler critiques Foucault for positing the rules of immanence but then breaking with these and pursuing an emancipatory discourse in his writing about Herculine Barbin, the 19<sup>th</sup> century French hermaphrodite. Herculine was assigned the sex of 'female' at birth, but in her early twenties was legally compelled to change her sex to 'male' after confessions to doctors and priests. Herculine is un-categorizable within the terms of the heterosexual gender binary, which divides people into male/female. Butler argues that Foucault sees Herculine as existing in an unregulated field of pleasure. Foucault (1978b) connects Herculine's transgressive pleasures to female sexuality. But Butler argues that this is sex categorization. For Butler, Herculine's sexuality does not exist in an unregulated field of pleasures full of transgressive thrills – the limits of Foucault's theory of the happy limbo of non-identity end when scorn is faced by Herculine.

Foucault's treatment of Herculine opens up some ambiguity as it concerns power and the body. Power acts on the body, but the body itself can also produce an effect. Power seems neither possessive nor possessed. Butler (2004b) argues this ambiguity as it concerns power and the body is the product of Foucault attempting to speak in a new vocabulary, one that is neither structuralist nor voluntaristic. Power enacts a body as a form of subjection, but the body is also self-crafting as a form of de-subjectification. On the one hand, there is a recognizable identity, and on the other, there is "what one might become" (pg. 192). Deleuze (1998:96) also points to this ambiguity: "if at the end of it Foucault finds himself in an impasse, this is not because of his conception of power but rather because he found the impasse to be where power itself places us, in both our lives and our thoughts, as we run up against it in our smaller truths". The strength of this ambiguity is that it suggests how becoming as a way of life can emerge while the body remains a nodal point of power.<sup>17</sup>

### *Following the Logic of the Lure*

My point is not to deny the tactical efficacy of people in interactions, but to suggest that the encounter itself produces unforeseeable parameters that shape the capability of people to exert influence, to define the situation. The above discussion of power and interaction highlights the limitations of voluntaristic claims concerning sex and sexuality. I have pointed to the importance of starting with the encounter, rather than questions of

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<sup>17</sup> How does institutional power exert control over sexuality? Numerous scholars (see Butler, 2004a; Rubin, 1993) have discussed issues of sexuality in relation to violence. Related to this is the issue of authority, where the possibility for a person to exercise agency is more or less removed from the interaction. Brickell (2009) uses the example of female sex workers in impoverished areas who are not in a position to use condoms, otherwise the clients would not pay for sex. Power operates differently in survival sex trade, there is no question. I am not arguing that the sociology of sex work should abandon this focus. Part of the reason why I focus on power as productive is that male-for-male internet escorting is largely without regulatory or institutional power for reasons that will become clear in Chapter Four when I discuss the social and economic position of the male-for-male internet escorts I have interviewed. There are no reported interactions with law enforcement agents, for instance. There are little to no interactions with public health agencies. The rationale for focusing on productive power is that the case demands it; other cases necessitate drawing upon a different conceptual model of power.

subjectivity, identity or any individual sense of self. The sociology of sexuality must start with what people do together. Yet sociologists also need a manner of theorizing elements of the encounter that are unpredictable and result from the open tendency.

Itinerant commercial sex amongst men who have sex with men is common, at least in global cities such as New York, London and Toronto. Nearly half of the 660 men who Koken and colleagues (2005) surveyed about casual sex had been paid by other men for sexual services. I am not arguing simply that men who have sex with men are promiscuous – this would be a highly essentializing claim. Following O’Byrne and colleagues (2008), the sociology of sexuality needs to try and undermine the ‘promiscuity paradigm’ that has framed the way scholars think of men who have sex with men. However, Ricco (2002) argues that analysis should start with the logic of the lure in itinerant sex encounters. This logic is not a matter of individual desire or a fixed sense of self, but implies following the story of anonymous sex as it happens. The logic of the lure refers not to a frequency of sex with new partners, but the way those encounters are sought and carried out. Male-for-male internet escorting encounters, I argue, often follow this itinerant and anonymous logic of the lure. Ricco’s focus is on the itinerant character of homoeroticism. Arguing that sex encounters between men in public are repeatedly unexpected, he stresses a relational logic that is indeterminate. Gove (2000) calls these encounters “passing pleasures”. Berlant and Warner (1998) have used the similar idea of “border intimacies”. Chauncey (1994) points to how these encounters lead to opportunities for men who have sex with men to fraternize.

The logic of the lure that Ricco (2002) points to is an erotic relationality that does not start from the presumed ontological stability of identity, but instead considers what is possible in relations between bodies. Berlant (2009) has likewise called for queer theorists

and activists to refuse thinking of men who have sex with men as a distinct subculture and instead focus on the diversity of actual practices of sex that same-sex relations entail. These encounters are full of uncertainty, improvisation, and fail to police themselves. Itinerant encounters and the fleeting non-identity that follows are not 'radical' in the sense that through them some broad change could be achieved. Encounters are creative openings in compulsive heterosexuality that undermine the way men come together.

Ricco argues that the logic of the lure we might call 'queer' has three elements: becoming imperceptible, anonymous sociality and itinerant encountering. Ricco (2005) asks that we 'name no one man,' since homoeroticism is always a relational encounter, selves that are open to others, never simply individual and never based on some fixed identity. My understanding is that Ricco (2002) is referring to examples such as tearoom trade and park sex. Dean (2009) likewise differentiates between public sex in cruising locales, which is based on an ethics of openness to others, and internet-based cruising, which eliminates the 'out in public' element. Dean is critical of internet-based cruising, which he argues is a way of avoiding, rather than fostering, contact with strangers: "Cruising online makes finding a sex partner indistinguishable from Internet shopping – except that the sex partner arrives at your home address sooner and returns appear easier" (pg. 194). Ashford (2008) argues the internet contributes to a standardization of sex amongst men. And Morton (1995) is critical of the "cyberqueer" who he argues is all too willing to participate in capitalist production and consumption as long as pleasure is continuously and readily available.

Although I share these critiques of the reduction of cruising space to cruising online, and the promotion of gay and lesbian marriage in place of cruising, I argue this emphasis on the itinerant and anonymous can be extended to male-for-male commercial sex in particular

cases. As I discuss in Chapter Eight and Chapter Nine, there are times when the same ethic of openness to others that is part of cruising emerges in the encounter between client and escort.

We are used to thinking of men's bodies as secure corporeal containers. Since men are rarely considered to be the object of sexuality, but are always its active subject, sociologists lack a thick description of male corporeality and the sexual specificity of men's bodies coming together, as well as the sorts of relations and practices such that touching can open up. What sorts of relations and practices can be generated by men's bodies coming together? It is exactly this coming together otherwise that Foucault (1997a:135) has in mind when he asks how to "use one's sexuality henceforth to arrive at a multiplicity of relationships". For Stephens (2004), however, every act of touching between men queers the boundary between so-called 'normal' and 'pathological' masculinity. Grosz (1994:201) also argues a different type of body is produced by this logic of the lure, it is a body open to otherness. Contrary to the phallicized or Oedipalized male body, the queer male body is a body that generates and receives a flow of bodily fluids, a different order of pleasure that disinvests men from heterosexual masculinity.

Itinerant encountering allows for bodies to be in play in ways that challenge our understandings of how men come together, which is what Stephens (1999) refers to as "homoerotic possibility". Stephens argues "the penis, and specifically the ejaculating penis, *convulses masculinity*, confounds not only the limits of the body but the self, which swoons, spasms, loses itself" (pg. 6, italics added). This loss is the loss of identity in the moment of coming together with others, the fuzzy imbrication of two figures. Convulsing masculinity suggests that the materiality of itinerant sex itself can undo sexual and gender identities through touching encounters between men.

## Conclusion

The following is a summary of the propositions offered in this chapter:

1. There are two tendencies in Foucault's writings, a closed tendency and an open tendency. The closed tendency is towards deployment of and adherence to discourses of sexuality. The open tendency is towards unanticipated relations and friendship.
2. There are two tendencies in an encounter according to interactionist sociology, one that is closing and one that is opening. The two tendencies start with Mead's comments on the 'me' and the 'I'. Goffman accounts for this closing tendency in his comments concerning roles and rituals. Blumer accounts for this opening tendency in his writings on meaning-making in action.
3. Encounters are corporeal. Encounters involve bodies coming together, touching.
4. Encounters involve power. Power, as the ability to produce an effect, flows in the interaction between participants.
5. Encounters can be itinerant. Those engaging in encounters do not necessarily need to be known by one another in any official or formal way.

I started this chapter with a note on Hacking's (2004) call to bring together Foucault and Goffman. I argue that Foucault should be brought together with a diversity of interactionist texts – not simply Goffman since Goffman focuses primarily on roles, boundaries, and rituals. Previous attempts to distil Foucault's comments regarding discourse and sexuality have not entirely brought Foucault down to the level of the encounter, and further theorizing homoerotic bodies and relations is necessary if Foucault is going to be made relevant for understanding male-for-male commercial sex relations.

## **CHAPTER FOUR – METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES**

### **The Research Project**

For the past three years I have been interviewing male-for-male internet escorts in numerous cities to understand how these men organize their work and make sense of their relationships with clients. The point of the project is not to provide an ethnographic account of escort sex, but a narrative account of their working and sex lives. This chapter offers some descriptive details about the 30 interviews I have conducted with male-for-male internet escorts, as well as the escorts themselves. I also discuss some conceptual issues regarding narrative and biography to provide a justification for how I have conceptualized and analyzed male-for-male internet escort narratives.

As it regards the geographical location of the escorts, four of the internet escorts I spoke with were based in Ottawa, another four lived in Montréal, 13 lived in Toronto, one lived in Houston but traveled to Toronto and New York consistently for work, four lived in New York (USA), and four lived in London (England). One escort had moved from London to Toronto just prior to our interview. I selected these cities because escorts often travel between them for work. Nearly half of the escorts I spoke with had traveled to at least one other city for work. The average age of these escorts was 34, with the youngest being 20 and the oldest being 64. All of the escorts advertised on specialty websites dedicated to male-for-male internet escorting, which is where I contacted them. These websites allow users to create a commercial profile, which potential clients consult. The profiles are searchable based on city location, features of the escort (e.g. ethnicity, penis size) and price (for more descriptive accounts of such websites – there are almost a hundred – see Lee-Gonyea and colleagues, 2009). Of the men I interviewed, the average age posted on the website was 29.

These escorts had been doing this work for an average of 6.5 years. One escort had been in the trade for under a year, while four had been doing this work for a decade or more. Two of the escorts I interviewed self-identified as black, four others identified as Latino, one identified as Lebanese, and remaining 23 identified as white.

Only two of the escorts who I interviewed started out with street-level prostitution. A few had worked brief stints with escorting agencies and massage parlours, but left because they felt escorting provided more income and less control from management. Two of the escorts had also worked in the porn film industry, in the porn magazine industry, and as models. Of the 30 men, 23 reported being enrolled in or having completed college or university. One man had completed a Master's degree in Mathematics, another a Ph.D in Psychology, and another had a Master's in Engineering. I know this information because I always asked the men if they work any other jobs. Escorting was not their only form of work, as 20 of the 30 men worked other jobs. Their second jobs ranged from artist, counselor, store manager, model, actor, to psychologist and technology specialist. Five of the escorts were college students at the time of interview.

In my communications with escorts, I used the same scripted email in every initial message. This script provided information about my rank as a sociologist and the aims of the research project. If I received a response, the second scripted communication I sent shared more information about the project. Male-for-male internet escorts often receive emails from men who use the communication as a ruse, in order to provide a context in which to touch themselves. Escorts refer to these individuals as time wasters or, as a sex worker in O'Connell Davidson's (1995) research termed them, "wank calls". All the escorts who

responded to the more detailed note I sent then engaged in a series of email exchanges, sometimes 30 or 40 emails, to ensure I was not a time waster or a police officer.

Pruitt (2008) argues it is unlikely that escorts would respond to an e-mail from a self-identified sociologist. He found lower response rates when contacting escorts as a self-identified sociologist compared to when he used deception as a recruitment strategy.

However, I was unwilling to use deception as a recruitment strategy since my goal was not to

| Interview | City         | Age                        | WebAge                   | Years                     | Education           | Other Work           | Ethnicity | StartAge                   | Pseudonym |
|-----------|--------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|-----------|----------------------------|-----------|
| msw#1     | OTT          | 44                         | 37                       | 12                        | -                   | -                    | black     | 32                         | Sam       |
| msw#2     | OTT          | 39                         | -                        | -                         | college             | -                    | white     | 25                         | Leon      |
|           |              |                            |                          | 10                        |                     |                      |           |                            |           |
| msw#3     | OTT          | 34                         | 27                       | (end)                     | college             | -                    | white     | 24                         | Tyler     |
| msw#4     | MONT         | 22                         | -                        | 3                         | university          | -                    | white     | 19                         | Jacques   |
| msw#5     | MONT         | 30                         | 28                       | 5                         | university          | artist               | white     | 25                         | Claude    |
| msw#6     | OTT          | 30                         | 25                       | 4                         | college             | -                    | white     | 26                         | Bob       |
| msw#7     | TOR          | 30                         | -                        | -                         | -                   | counseling           | white     | -                          | Bruce     |
| msw#8     | TOR          | 39                         | 33                       | 13                        | college             | store manager        | white     | 26                         | Ricky     |
| msw#9     | TOR          | 23                         | -                        | -                         | -                   | -                    | white     | -                          | Gabe      |
| msw#10    | TOR          | 42                         | 31                       | -                         | college             | film maker           | white     | -                          | Conrad    |
| msw#11    | TOR          | 29                         | -                        | 10                        | -                   | -                    | white     | 19                         | Eddy      |
| msw#12    | TOR          | 33                         | -                        | (end)                     | university          | psychologist         | white     | -                          | Steve     |
| msw#13    | TOR          | 21                         | -                        | -                         | -                   | eatery manager       | white     | -                          | Ryan      |
| msw#14    | Houston      | 24                         | -                        | 2.5                       | university          | tutor                | Latino    | 22                         | Byron     |
| msw#15    | NY           | 24                         | 21                       | 6                         | college             | model                | black     | 18                         | Mike      |
| msw#16    | NY           | 44                         | -                        | 17                        | college             | clothing designer    | Latino    | 27                         | Roberto   |
| msw#17    | NY           | 50                         | 40                       | 4                         | college<br>college, | -                    | white     | 46                         | Donald    |
| msw#18    | NY           | 40                         | -                        | 1                         | BSE, BEE            | technology sector    | white     | 39                         | Jeff      |
| msw#19    | MONT         | 33                         | 23                       | 2                         | -                   | -                    | white     | 31                         | Chris     |
| msw#20    | London       | 35                         | 29                       | 2.5                       | university          | film maker           | Latino    | 32                         | Ben       |
| msw#21    | London       | 36                         | 34                       | 4                         | -                   | personal trainer     | white     | 32                         | Mark      |
| msw#22    | London       | 31                         | -                        | 2                         | college             | -                    | white     | 29                         | Jake      |
| msw#23    | London       | 56                         | 48                       | 10                        | college             | porn, stage acting   | white     | 46                         | Oscar     |
| msw#24    | TOR          | 64                         | -                        | 22                        | university          | freelance journalist | white     | 42                         | Gerald    |
| msw#25    | MONT         | 36                         | 34                       | 3                         | college             | accounting           | white     | 33                         | Harvey    |
| msw#26    | TOR          | 20                         | 20                       | 1.5                       | university          | call centre          | Lebanese  | 19                         | Frank     |
| msw#27    | TOR/<br>LOND | 43                         | 33                       | 16                        | college             | service economy      | white     | 27                         | Garry     |
| msw#28    | TOR          | 33                         | 29                       | 1/3                       | university          | electrical engineer  | Latino    | 29                         | Frederico |
| msw#29    | TOR          | 25                         | 22                       | 2                         | college             | service economy      | white     | 23                         | Sean      |
| msw#30    | TOR          | 22                         | 20                       | 6                         | university          | service economy      | white     | 16                         | Josh      |
|           |              | <b>Avg=</b><br><b>34.4</b> | <b>Avg=</b><br><b>29</b> | <b>Avg=</b><br><b>6.5</b> | <b>77%</b>          |                      |           | <b>Avg=</b><br><b>28.3</b> |           |

have escorts complete a survey but to speak with me in person. Pruitt also comments on how using a first and last name in the title of the email leads to lower response rates. However, I used both my first and last name, because I did not want escorts to confuse me for a client. In addition to contacting escorts on their websites, I placed advertisements in Ottawa-based queer-friendly publications. Only one interview was secured in this way. I had a phone extension at a university in Ottawa for the duration of the research, which was not shared, so I could assure those who called of their confidentiality and anonymity.

I emailed 550 escorts on three different sites (Canadianmale.com, boys2rent.com, men4rentnow.com) and received 56 responses, which resulted in 30 total interviews. Some escorts asked for remuneration that I could not afford to provide. One escort wrote back, “I will chat with you, for £900,” while several others said they would chat with me for their hourly rate. Another escort in New York asked for \$100 American an hour. Initially I was offering \$50 remuneration for the entire interview. Towards the end of the interview phase I had to scale down to \$35, then \$20, for lack of funds. I provided what I could to ensure an adequate sample. As it regards the limitations of my sample, it is possible that only escorts interested in remuneration responded to my messages. There was only one interview where I sensed the respondent was there to take the money and run – not surprisingly this was the shortest interview (37 minutes). Most interviews lasted 80 minutes or longer. Further, I might have only connected with the more ‘active’ escorts who are online often. Oliffe and Mróz (2005) argue that men need to be more actively recruited to research projects, and it is possible that I was not assertive enough in my recruitment. A separate limitation of the sample is that I am missing a complete data set as it concerns certain indicators, such as self-reporting on education, web age, and real age.

Once a sufficient number of emails had been exchanged to ensure I was not wasting their time, arrangements were made to meet for an interview. Taking the first minute to introduce myself as a sociologist studying sex work, and ensuring the respondent that their confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained, I interviewed many men in coffee shops (the background noise in these locations created a sense of anonymity and confidentiality). I interviewed some escorts outside at bus stops and on park benches, because they felt these locations offered anonymity and confidentiality. I also interviewed four of the escorts in their homes, since this was more convenient for their schedules or, again, offered sought-after anonymity and confidentiality. All of the interviews were conducted in person, except for the interview with the escort from Houston and two of the interviews in London. A face-to-face interview encounter is more complex than a telephone chat (Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004), as conversations of gestures can strongly influence what is verbally stated. Yet phone interviews still allow respondents to share stories and may be more appropriate with some respondent groups (Holt, 2010). All interviews were taped and then transcribed.

### **A Note on the Sample**

One issue that has shaped this research project and the story I can tell about the work of these men is their social and economic position relative to other men involved in the commercial sex industry. As the table above illustrates, a large majority of these men have been successful with post-secondary education, and several of them work other well-paying jobs. Certainly the social and economic position of these men influences the kinds of claims I can make about their relations with clients as well as their work. In Chapter Seven, I discuss the role of the internet in labour process as well as the sexual entrepreneurialism these men engage in – these are issues that do not emerge in other forms of sex work such as on-street

sex work. In Chapter Eight's discussion of intimacy, I describe how some of the touching encounters these men have with clients involve elements of friendship. In Chapter Six on aging and life histories, I demonstrate that there is a lack of 'bad stories' about violence, poverty or drug use with these men. One reason for this might be the social and economic position of this sample of escorts. Another reason might have to do with the average age of these escorts, which is higher than other samples of male escorts (see Minichiello et al., 2008). Many of these men report it was their 'choice' to enter escorting, so the other side of the story, working without choice, is not addressed here because of these limitations of my sample. All of these features of the narratives that male-for-male internet escorts shared with me can be conceptualized as related to their social and economic position.

As mentioned previously, my recruitment strategy might have only put me in contact with escorts who are online often, who treat their work as a serious business. The claims I am making would differ if I had greater representation from a poorer strata of this specific group or a mixed sample of male-for-male internet escorts and on-street works. The decisions I have made in analyzing these men's narratives and using certain theoretical tools to guide my writing lean towards telling a story that does not represent the majority of people who work in the commercial sex industry, and only partially represents male-for-male internet escorts (those who are highly educated, in a certain age bracket, and in particular cities). Yet, it is precisely the exclusivity of this sample that makes the story I create in *Touching Encounters* a unique one, a story that has not been provided much space in the sociology of sex work, perhaps because research tends to focus primarily on female sex work and on-street sex work. There has recently been a big shift in the sociology of sex work to focus on erotic dancers, agency-based workers, and other sectors of the commercial sex industry (see

Bernstein, 2007a; Sanders, 2005; Pruitt, 2005; Bruckert, 2002). I hope the story I am creating in *Touching Encounters* contributes to and enriches the discussion in a small way.

### **A Note on Interview Questions**

1. Can you tell me how long you have been involved in this work and how you first got involved?
2. Can you tell me a bit more specifically what the work entails?
3. Can you say a bit about the industry as a whole, describe it to someone who has no idea how it is organized?
4. What kind of skills do you need to do this work?
5. How important is the body and appearance to this work?
6. What sorts of stuff do you have to do to take care of your body for this work?
7. Can you tell me about a time you were working and something funny happened?
8. Can you tell me about a time you were working and you felt afraid?
9. Can you tell me about a time you were working you felt sad?
10. Can you tell me about a time you were working and you felt pleasure, like it was fun?
11. Can you tell me about a time you were working and you felt embarrassed?
12. Can you tell me about a time you were working and you felt bored?
13. Can you say a bit about the ways you advertise this work?
14. Did you ever feel like you were competing against other workers for any reason?
15. Did you ever worry about making enough money?
16. Have you ever worried about your health because of this work?
17. Do you always feel you have access to the services you need to do the work?
18. Was there anything else about this work that caused you worry at any time?
19. Do you ever get burnt out or worn out from it?
20. So what do you think is the riskiest part of the work?
21. Can you say a bit more about the clientele you work with?
22. How are relations with repeat clients different than with first time clients?
23. How has doing this work changed the way you feel about your self?
24. How has doing this work changed the way you think about your masculinity?
25. Can you say a bit more about how you think of your body in relation to this work?
26. Do you ever feel you have to act or manage emotions with clients?
27. Has it been tough to keep up personal and familial relations because of this work?
28. How has this work changed the way you think about what is risky?
29. How has this work changed the way you think about sexuality?

This list of questions appears in my ethics application for the research project. Ethics applications require a set list of questions, assuming that all interviews are highly structured. Although structured and semi-structured interviewing techniques are appropriate for some research, I follow a narrative-based interviewing strategy for these interviews (see Rosenthal,

2003). Eliciting significant stories about particular events, narrative interviewing allows respondents to provide a thick description of their relations with others. In this case, the particular events are the touching encounters escorts have had with clients.

During a narrative interview, interjections are only made by the researcher if the dialogue becomes completely off topic. The next question I pose as a researcher must resonate with the last narrative fragment offered by the respondent. Put otherwise, this interviewing strategy focuses on internal narrative; ideas raised by previous responses to questions matter as much or more than ideas external to the research encounter. If I had asked about emotions and relations with clients, and the respondent had mentioned something about intimacy, the next question I pose would likely follow on the theme of intimacy. The next question I pose in the interview could be any from the list above, or could even stray from the list depending on the previous response. Narrative interviewing requires an interviewer who is listening to what the respondent is saying and reflexively building a dialogue within the parameters established by the research design. However, as already mentioned, if the dialogues strays from the established questions into a different set of issues, this is not necessarily a problem according to a narrative-based interviewing strategy, and may generate new themes that become salient in future interviews and the overall analysis.

Even though I did not ask these interview questions in any particular order, and often rephrased them during interviews depending on the language that the escort was comfortable with (see Chapter Five for this discussion), the interview questions were provoked by broader empirical questions I set out to address with this research. For instance, as mentioned in Chapter Two, gay and lesbian studies tend to reduce sexualities to particular fixed identities. Although queer theory purposefully attempts to address questions of fluidity and identity, it

does not place much emphasis on aging and sexualities, for instance. With my research I have tried to make sense of *how age-graded sexualities influence the work of male-for-male internet escorting*. This broad empirical question concerning aging, sexualities and the life course is addressed in Chapter Six. In Chapter One, I mentioned that existing literature in the sociology of sex work has not fully examined *how the labour process of male-for-male escorting has changed in connection to internet advertising*. The sociology of sex work has not investigated *how the labour process of male-for-male internet escorting differs from other kinds of sex work*. These broad empirical questions concerning the sexual entrepreneurialism of escorts are addressed in Chapter Seven. In Chapter Three, I critiqued sociological understandings of sexuality that overemphasize interaction scripts, presenting a discussion of Foucault and interactionist sociology to conceptualize *how sexual encounters are socially ordered as well as how encounters provide moments of emergence where sexual scripts are mutated and undone*. This broad empirical question concerning the two tendencies of sexual encounters is addressed in Chapter Eight. Finally, in Chapter Three I argued that the sociology of sexuality should explore *how bodies come together in sexual encounters and how discourses of sexuality are translated through touch*. This broad empirical question is investigated in Chapter Nine through analyzing escort narratives concerning body work and body trouble. Whereas the preceding chapters have been theoretical, the following chapters offer analysis of particular issues guided by the earlier discussion of theory as well as these broad empirical questions.

### **Issues of Narrative and Biography in working with Sexual Stories**

The point of this research project is to provide a narrative account of the working and sex lives of male-for-male interview escorts. Since I have been engaged in narrative

interviewing, and have conducted a form of narrative analysis to make sense of the transcripts, how narrative is defined becomes crucial. Here I offer a discussion of narrative as I am treating it - as a small story about past interactions elicited in a research encounter - since eliciting and analyzing narrative is a methodological issue.

Narrative is a smaller part of a bigger story people tell about their relations. However, in this text my approach to narrative holds that the smaller part of the overall story one tells about one's relations is not a pure route to some unmediated self (see Doucet and Mauthner, 2008a; Doucet and Mauthner, 2008b). The stories we tell about our relations with others are unevenly narrated because the way we interpret the past is always shifting on us (Scott, 1996). Narratives are not often presented as linear but instead are re-ordered according to interpretive acts of remembering (Harding, 2006). In telling a story, one is re-presenting, interpreting and elaborating (see Squire, 2008; Squire, 2005; Mattley, 2002; Snow and Anderson, 1993). In re-presenting, one is also fashioning one's sense of self in relation to discourses that provide a grid of intelligibility for understanding our place in the world (Tamboukou, 2008; Polkinghorne, 1988) – this is how narratives link up with broader discourses, discourses of sexuality for instance. Though discourses shape the stories we share with others, interpretation means the story can shift or have a contrapuntal character.

Although some varieties of narrative analysis emphasize the personal, I focus on narratives produced out of encounters. When analyzing narratives, one needs to strike a balance between biography, with its emphasis on the personal, and broader discourses that shape the way we tell stories to begin with (Phoenix, 2008; Doucet, 2006). To focus solely on the personal would create an account devoid of context. To focus only on discourses would create an account devoid of biography. Biography is important to social science, since

the researcher tells a story using the stories others have told through remembering some encounters they have had. However, in my analysis I place less emphasis on biography and more on the discourses of sexuality and labour apparent in the talk of escorts.

In this sense, 'biography' is not what really happened to a person but is a story generated out of a research encounter pertaining to some other encounter. A sense of self is generated out of story telling – the self that the story alludes to is not the 'real' self but socially facilitated through the process of telling the story.<sup>18</sup> In other words,

...the interviewer and the subject conspire to construct a version of the self – and the strategies they employ in that conspiracy will probably derive from the shared, unspoken regularities of interaction expectations in their culture (Angrosino, 1989:104).

The story and the text that follow are products of interactions, including various spectral figures (such as past intimate partners) who show up in the way we speak and write about ourselves and our relations. What the researcher is dealing with is not real life but the told life (also see Nilsen, 2008).<sup>19</sup> This approach to narrative analysis operates in the conceptual space "...between subjects who structure their lives and subjects who are overly structured..." (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008a:401). With narrative, the social scientific impetus to generalize meets a "gossamer wall" where the researcher is confronted with her/his past, with the affect of respondents and other researchers, and with an audience who will make their own unpredictable interpretations of the account (Doucet, 2008).

My use of narrative must be made sense of as part of the recent rise to popularity of narrative analysis across the social sciences. The shift towards narrative as a central focus in

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<sup>18</sup> Life history refers to "the account of a person's life 'as told to' another, the researcher" (Angrosino, 1989:3). Whereas life history provides narratives pertaining to particular encounters, life stories are attempts to cover the span of one's existence. I am obviously dealing with the former.

<sup>19</sup> Another way of putting this is that "life stories are joint actions assembled through social contexts into texts by authors and readers" (Plummer, 2001:399). This interpretive-interactionist approach emphasizes the role of the researcher in creating the 'self' of the research participant presented in sociological writings. In this sense, "analysis creates the human it sets out to explore" (Bersani, 1995:145).

social science is a move away from authoritative truth seeking towards interpretation, which repositions the researcher as an interpreter and storyteller instead of an expert (Mello, 2002). This move towards narrative means that traditional formats for coding interview transcripts are reconsidered in light of dilemmas regarding authorship and reflexivity across disciplines. Traditionally, the coding of transcripts used pre-conceived codes purported to represent universal knowledge or the abstracting a category from a set of transcripts that would be applied to the entire sample. Here is the difference: a respondent's narrative need not be assimilated to a universal category or even themes from other transcripts. Large parts of a respondent's narrative telling may be kept intact for the way the words evince the force of context on that narrative (see Czarniawska, 2004). Just as narrative interviewing is fluid in how it moves from question to question, narrative analysis is reflexive in the relationship established between the transcripts, text and the author. In certain chapters, such as Chapter Six, I let the narratives speak more for themselves than in later chapters, meaning that I draw from narrative analysis variably depending on the particular theoretical and empirical questions each chapter addresses.

Turning to narrative is not a solution for addressing the problems of authority faced by social scientists. Even with the narrative turn, the problem according to Rhodes (2000:519) is that "the power of the researcher to shape and construct meaning out of interviews is hidden through the sanitized output of the interview transcript". Narrative analysts too often offer an infatuation with 'the subject' or 'self' instead of putting emphasis on how the big stories of culture shape the little stories we share with others, especially when it comes to study of sexuality (see Tomso, 2009; Tanggaard, 2009; Crossley, 2004). Atkinson and Delamont (2006) argue that qualitative research as of late celebrates the biographical

aspects of personal accounts too much and fails to link these accounts up to cultural genres in which narratives are elicited.<sup>20</sup>

Most crucially, there have been questions raised about narrative approaches to understanding corporeality. Radley (1997) contends that claims about the body being made and unmade by discourse need to be qualified. Radley's point is that "there is an embodiment beyond that which is captured within speech...the body in its material aspect" (pg. 98). The body is elusive, which means that while narrative based research is not useless for understanding corporeal processes, "it does not follow that narrative is in itself the royal road to an understanding of embodiment" (pg. 99). I think Radley's critique equally applies to this text – therefore I am careful only to make claims about escort *narratives* concerning bodies, touching, intimacy, and so on. For this reason I differentiate between the touching encounter and the storied encounter, the latter being a narrativized version of previous interactions.

I have elicited the narratives of male-for-male internet escorts to tell a story about the intersections of their sex and their work. Yet there still remains the issue of how to work with the stories escorts share. Narrative analysis tends to focus too little on how theory and context matter for the account that is produced (Atkinson and Delamont, 2006; Honan et al., 2002). I have drawn from what is referred to as Listening Guide analysis to address this issue. Listening Guide data analysis prefaces the importance of narrative in constructing self, and attends to how the narrated subject is constituted by structural and cultural factors (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998). Through emphasizing the role of the researcher who interprets the narrative, and focusing on how narratives are shaped by broader discourses, Listening

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<sup>20</sup> Nor is there anything innovative about dealing with narrative per se. For instance, Minichiello and colleagues (2000) use diaries to collect narratives pertaining to male sex workers practices for the purpose of categorizing and intervening in their lives with the backing of public health agencies.

Guide analysis strikes a balance between letting the narrative tell the story and asking theoretically informed questions of the data during analysis.

### **A Note on Data Analysis**

The very capacity to convince a reader about the soundness of one's claims starts with and relies heavily upon the data analysis process. Yet until recently little has been written about qualitative data analysis (e.g. how to deal with the data one has produced) in sociology. This section discusses some issues pertaining to qualitative data analysis. Research encounters are what Smith (2005:135-139) calls "data dialogues". The primary data dialogue is between the interviewer or participant observer and one or more persons the researcher is interested to talk with or watch interacting. A secondary data dialogue occurs between the researcher and the transcript of the audio recorded interview or the field notes. Stories are produced out of these dialogues. But this language of primary and secondary dialogues is misleading; it assumes data analysis is a minor concern compared to data production. Given that data analysis is a more theoretically demanding practice than interviewing or observing, and given that analysis is integrally tied also to one's method of exposition and writing about the research to several audiences, the neglect of data analysis in qualitative sociology is a serious problem.

Also referred to as the "voice-centered relational method," the Listening Guide was developed in relational psychology by Brown and Gilligan (1992). At the core of the Listening Guide is a relational social ontology, which posits that selves are always in relation to others instead of isolated or separate. There is no one singular way to conduct Listening Guide data analysis, but there are several steps held in common by those who use it (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998). There are typically four steps involved. The first step is to

listen for the general plot, including protagonists being described by respondents. This step involves reading for plot, actors, and also researcher reactions to the plot. This is a relational reading. Here I must be aware of my role as a researcher, be aware of how I am reading the transcript in the second data dialogue and how I produced the transcript in the first data dialogue (which will be discussed in Chapter Five). This first reading also involves reading myself in the story (Doucet, 2006). How do my own views influence the production of the text? Interpretation is central to this initial reading of the transcripts (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008), where the researcher's views shape the text that is produced.

There was a time earlier in my life when I worked as an interviewer on a project pertaining to sex work. I interviewed male and female on-street sex workers. Those interviews do not form part of the data for this project, but the encounters I had years ago as a research assistant have influenced this project and continue to animate my interest in the topic. As the teller of this story, I should say that I consider myself sexually anarchistic. My own personal approach to sexuality is one that aims to subvert rather than confess fixed and singular senses of identity. As much as it make sense to refer to any solid form of straight, gay or lesbian identities, I feel the corresponding communities can be equally hostile to those not considered sexuality insiders. These details about my politics and my biography influence the way I work with texts in analysis.

In the second step of Listening Guide analysis, the interview transcript is listened to for the "voice of the I," or how the respondent narrates their sense of self. The voice of the "I" could be phrased in any personal pronoun. "I" refers to the sense of self constructed through narrative. Construction of a sense of self through narrative is what Somers (1994) calls "ontological narratives". What is amplified in this reading is how the subject sees

himself/herself, how s/he narrativizes himself/herself or provides an ontological narrative, which evinces the power of narratives in forming conceptions of self. Gilligan and colleagues (2005) use “I Poems” to construct flows of text that reflect the voice of the I. There are two rules to making “I Poems”. The first rule is to pull out every first person “I” in a given excerpt, along with the verb and important information that follows (Doucet, 2006). The second rule is to maintain the sequence in which the narrative fragments originally occurred in the story. Narrative fragments are arranged on separate lines. The “I Poem” brings one’s talk about one’s self to the fore, which can illuminate aspects of the story not visible when the narrative fragments remain as parts of the whole transcript.

*Conrad’s “I Poem”*

I hired a male escort  
I enjoy it 99% of the time  
I would say it’s a little more professional on the internet  
I don’t do any of that stuff  
I’m not a pro and I’m not you know I’m not a scam artist  
I do it for extra money here and there  
I used to be an architect, believe it or not  
I basically tell them you’re not going to get what you want  
I’m always reading them  
I avoid sex at all costs  
I do everything I would do with a boyfriend  
I tell them on the phone  
I don’t like bringing them to my place  
I don’t really want my mother to know  
I don’t give too much information  
I go on this other site too  
I market myself I guess as sort of like a real person  
I don’t have pedicures  
I assume everyone is positive  
I had a condom break one time  
I wouldn’t tell  
I don’t like being around drunks  
I just treat it very kind of casual  
I get more honesty from a fucking client than I do from a guy that I meet  
I’ve been sort of dating  
I can find something that arouses me

I want a repeat customer so I'm not going to screw them over  
I tracked every ad, I printed them out and I put them in order time-wise and I figured out who did it  
I just can't fake

The "I Poem" provides a foray into understanding how the respondent narrates their sense of self within the overall context of the interview (Doucet, 2006). Creating an "I Poem" for every transcript helps me to hear elements of the story that the respondent is sharing that may be lost in the overall transcript, which helps me return to the transcript and select narratives to work with in analysis. With an "I Poem," one should not read the use of 'I' in the same way as Mead separates 'I' from 'me'. For Mead (1967/1934), the 'me' takes the role of the other. The 'me' is therefore "a conventional, habitual individual" (pg. 197). But the 'I' "reacts to the self which arises through the taking of the attitudes of others" (pg. 174).

Whereas the 'me' is oriented towards doing a duty, fulfilling a habit, the 'I' is an "action over against that social situation within his [sic] own conduct...". With an "I Poem," the personal pronoun could refer to either 'I' or 'me' in Mead's approach – this tension needs to be sorted out through conducting Listening Guide analysis itself and replaying the audio recording.

*Donald's "I Poem"*

I've been doing it now I guess for close to three years  
I contacted them and I ended up getting paid to do a couple of massage sessions  
I started advertising on Craigslist  
I was also looking to find some kind of part time work  
I've sort of targeted that niche  
I flogged his back and his backside  
I was about to take him down, he fainted into my arms  
I saw him several more times  
I finally dropped a couple of ads on the websites that charged too much  
I would engage in sex without condoms with people unprofessionally but professionally I would definitely always use a condom  
I certainly do not want to catch anything  
I read a lot about the theory of escorting before I even got started  
I kind of cut corners and I start to rush through things

I'm not getting any feedback  
I got hard, I figured, well, just jerk us both off  
I found that just even privately I needed a little extra boost  
I was able to carry on for a full session  
I have to travel  
I mention it on the phone, if they want to meet at a hotel I can arrange it  
I just sort of round things off to a figure, you know, it will work itself out in the end  
I might feel jealous that, you know, I think they look better  
I used escort services  
I also have a very supportive partner  
I hear stories of the old days when guys would line up on street corners  
I read in an article recently that as far as the suburban escort has just become a whole new phenomenon that didn't exist before  
I advertised on Rentboy  
I grew up on the west coast and came to the east coast for college and then stayed here  
I noticed about older clients too that they like they're not so focused on ejaculation  
I'll email you

Gilligan and colleagues (2003) argue that the first two steps in the Listening Guide provide an interpretive base for the next two stages. In Gilligan's version of the Listening Guide, researchers next listen for "contrapuntal voices," or multiple voices within one story that are reflective of the broader relations the subject is enmeshed in (Gilligan et al., 2005). Each contrapuntal voice is underlined with a different coloured pen. Contrapuntal voices are not necessarily contradictory and may even complement each other. In Mauthner and Doucet's (1998) version of the Listening Guide, the third step – listening for contrapuntal voices – is broken into two separate phases, prefacing the theoretical frameworks of the researcher (which for me are a Foucaultian understanding of sexuality and a Goffmanian-Blumerian understanding of interaction). These readings attempt to offer an analysis of power in the everyday lives of the respondents, which involves listening for relations or broader social networks the respondent is enmeshed in, which are in fact constitutive of the voice of the "I" and general plot to some degree (although the general plot and voice of the "I" cannot be reduced to the relations the respondent participates in). This third reading, then,

is also a reading for social networks, informed by feminist critiques of the autonomous individual. Here I would like to highlight the idea of the “We Poem” as an additional means of locating narrative fragments. These poems are forays into understanding the ways respondents narrate their relations with others.

*Conrad’s “We Poem”*

we can make money doing this  
we both kind of started together  
we are the ones that worry about it and think about it  
we were major shit disturbers, like sex-positive and all that stuff  
we went out to dinner in public  
we just went to a resort in Long Island  
we would have lunch and we were together

*Donald’s “We Poem”*

we arranged to meet for a session at the dungeon  
we’ll do this, next time we’ll do that  
we talked about it and thought you know it could be an interesting experiment

Using the “We Poem” as a foray into understanding how respondents narrate their relations with others is a complement to the “I Poem,” since it can help the researcher narrow in on the way the respondents talk about their sense of self compared to how they talk about their relations with others as well as when these key shifts in narration occur.

Fourth, the transcript is analyzed for the cultural contexts and structural forces that traverse the respondent and limit her/his capacity for action (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998). Put another way, this fourth dimension of analysis listens for how the narration of self links up with broader discourses of sexuality, gender, ethnicity, ability, age, et cetera. This reading considers the way the subject is structured (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008). This is not a grounded theory approach, but is instead explicitly concerned with how the theoretical interests of the researchers intersect with the stories shared by respondents. There is also an

explicit presencing of the researcher in the voice-centered relational method, which means reflexivity and a consideration of the role of power in the social relations of research is crucial. In using Listening Guide analysis, one needs to note that they are dealing with respondent narratives, not respondent experiences (Doucet, 2006). Illuminative of the respondent's sense of self and relations with others, the words of escorts are elaborations and interpretations, hence the emphasis on storied encounters I underscore in this text.

When researchers go from the talk of respondents to theoretical claims, we are working in the realm of interpretation. One must be careful not to jettison the respondent's words in favour of letting concepts do all the talking. A key challenge for me has been to address the potential for misrepresentation at each stage of the research process as well as my own impact concerning every decision made about the research, from the framing of the research questions through to analysis and writing.

## **CHAPTER FIVE – INTERVIEWS AS ENCOUNTERS: ISSUES OF SEXUALITY AND REFLEXIVITY WHEN MEN INTERVIEW MEN ABOUT COMMERCIAL SAME SEX RELATIONS**

### **The Line between Escort-Client and Escort-Researcher**

The encounter between the internet escort and client parallels the encounter between internet escort and researcher. From these interviews I know that the client contacts the escort by email after consulting the escort's website. I also contacted the escorts by email. A few emails are exchanged between the escort and client to make sure the client is not a police officer, and then the escort and client swap details about where and when to meet; likewise for the escort and researcher. As with the encounter between escort and client, the beginnings of my encounters with escorts consisted of questions, queries and confessions. The escort and client share an hour or longer engaging together, interpreting the words and gestures of each other in figuring out what to say and do next – same with the escort and researcher. The client hands over money to the escort for the time spent. I handed over remuneration. Following both encounters, an email comprised of kind greetings might be sent.

There are, of course, key differences. For one, the client's initial email concerns what sexual services are available, whereas I initially sent messages to see if escorts would be willing to talk with me about their work. The client wants his anonymity guaranteed, whereas my job is to secure the anonymity and confidentiality of the escorts as respondents. The client and escort often meet in a bedroom, whereas my meetings with escorts almost always took place in coffee shops. The client and escort engage in live sex, or maybe they snuggle, eat pizza and watch a movie, whereas the escort and I engage in a focused dialogue concerning past happenings at work. The client tells the escort in a message the next day 'you were fantastic,' whereas I am keen to know if the escort recalled any other work stories.

This chapter is an investigation of the epistemological issues that arise in interview encounters between men when sex and sexuality are being discussed. Because both the researcher and the respondent have the capacity to shape the encounter, interviews are best conceived as performative collaborations (see Atkinson and Delamont, 2006; Plummer, 1995). Both respondent and researcher try to make sense of what is being said and done in order to conjure up their next rejoinder. Contributing to debates regarding reflexivity (see Doucet and Mauthner, 2008; Mauthner and Doucet, 2003) as well as the production of sexual stories (Plummer, 1995), in this chapter I analyze moments where, as the researcher, I was sexualized by respondents, with a particular focus on how my verbal and bodily responses to moments of sexualization shaped and modified the meanings produced through the research encounter. I draw from the work of Goffman (1961) and Blumer (1969) to theorize interviews as encounters, and to conceptualize sexualization as moments of emergence shaping the outcome of the interview. I argue that Goffman and Blumer together can help us account for the two tendencies of any encounter: the tendency towards following scripts and falling back on set roles (theorized by Goffman), as well as the tendency towards unanticipated consequences of interaction and meaning in the making (theorized by Blumer).

When sex, sexuality and other 'touchy' subjects such as intimacy and the body are topics of interview dialogue, some interesting considerations concerning reflexivity are introduced into the research process, insofar as the researcher can become the object of sexualization. In her research with male clients of female sex workers, Grenz (2005), a female sociologist who conducted fieldwork in Germany, found she was constantly sexualized in her encounters with respondents, even in correspondence prior to the interview. Likewise, in interviews I have conducted with male-for-male internet escorts, I found that

many (but not all) escorts related to me in a sexualized manner. The analysis here focuses on how my responses to the words and gestures of escorts influenced the course of the interview, and how, at times, I attempted to redefine the interaction as a research encounter (when respondents wanted our meeting to become a touching encounter).

Anthropologists have written a great deal about how sex and sexuality matter during fieldwork and during the interpretation of field notes (see La Pastina, 2006; Carrier, 1999; Bolton, 1995; Seizer, 1995; Newton, 1993). Being honest and critical as it concerns sex and research is positioned as part of the reflexive turn in anthropology (Seizer, 1995). Sociologists can learn from these debates. There has been a tendency in sociological research to neglect how male researchers interviewing men are sexualized as well as sexualizing beings. If sociologists have remained silent as it regards the sexual politics of research (Goode, 2002), even less has been written on men interviewing men about sex. Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2002) have written about the specifics of men interviewing other men, but these authors did not consider the issue of men interviewing men regarding same-sex relations, and so did not reflect on queer sexualities. The first question often posed to me at the start of interviews was “*are you gay?*” The “*are you gay?*” question seeks out a singular identity declaration and momentarily flips over established researcher-respondent roles. This confession of sexuality from the researcher demanded by the respondent shapes how the respondent bestows status upon the researcher as a sexuality insider, and is consequential for the dialogue that emerges from the interview. The reflexivity of the respondent is thus as important as the reflexivity of the researcher in shaping interviews (see Riach, 2009).

This chapter is organized in four parts. Firstly, I compare Goffman’s (1961) and Blumer’s (1969) writings concerning the encounter to produce an interactionist

conceptualization of interviewing, arguing that it is critical to emphasize the unanticipated elements of research encounters. Secondly, I emphasize the reflexivity of the respondents by analyzing the various propositions and moments of sexualization that occurred during my research. I conclude with a discussion of how understandings of sexuality are both produced and contested in encounters, even research encounters, through interaction.

### **Theorizing (Interview) Encounters**

As several authors concerned with interviews, interaction and identity have pointed out (see Thapar-Björkert and Henry, 2004; Best, 2003; Coffey, 1999; Arendell, 1997; Holstein and Gubrium, 1995), researchers do not have complete control in the interview encounter nor should they seek authority over respondents. Posing as an authority can deter the respondent from providing lengthy stories. Establishing rapport in an interview is complicated, since one never knows how certain words or gestures might be interpreted, which has consequences for the development of a dialogue. Given the possibility for unanticipated shifts of power and identity play in the interview, how should we conceive of encounters between researchers and respondents? I will draw from the accounts of Goffman (1961) and Blumer (1969) to provide such a conceptualization.

In Goffman's (1961) notion of the encounter, there are certain rules: "an encounter exhibits sanctioned orderliness arising from obligations fulfilled and expectations realized, and that therein lies its structure" (pg. 19). He argues there is a "boundary between the wider world and the mutual activity embedded in a focused gathering" (pg. 33), though "the barrier to externally realized properties [i]s more like a screen than like a solid wall". Goffman believes that "the screen not only selects but also transforms and modifies what is passed through it". Some encounters have stronger barriers than others, according to Goffman. The

barrier is like an interaction membrane: “If we think of an encounter as having a metaphorical membrane around it... the dynamics of an encounter will be tied to the functioning of the boundary-maintaining mechanisms that cut the encounter off selectively from wider worlds” (pg. 66). An encounter is to be understood in terms of the interaction membrane around it, which sets it on a certain course. The tendency in Goffman’s version of the encounter, therefore, is towards following scripts and falling back on set roles.

It is common for Goffman to come to mind in discussions of encounters, because Goffman is often touted as an interactionist. Yet Goffman was more indebted to Durkheim’s ideas concerning rituals and the sacred than he was to the so-called Chicago School (Manning, 2005; Collins, 1986), meaning that Goffman’s characters are not actual but ideal. Goffman’s studies were treated as ethnographic when they were a step removed (see Katz, 2004). What Goffman provides us is a clear account of how our accordance to scripts and roles leads to the achievement and maintenance of everyday orderliness. For example, there are roles (e.g. researcher, respondent) framing the research encounter that are inescapable and constantly negotiated. Unlike interactionists, however, Goffman is not much concerned about how scripts and roles are undermined by what the encounter produces. This notion of an interaction membrane, which is granted some independence over and above the encounter itself in mediating the participants, is not compatible with the interactionist emphasis on the productiveness and unpredictability of meaning-making during encounters. For Goffman, the interview encounter would be rule-bound like a game, as if only the predictable could emanate from the participants’ talk.

To account for what is unanticipated in encounters, we can turn to Blumer. For Blumer (1969), meaning does not emanate from the intrinsic properties of an object, nor is it

assembled out of the psychological elements of persons. Meaning arises out of interaction: “The meaning of a thing for a person grows out of the ways in which other persons act toward the person with regard to the thing” (pg. 4). Interactions are not rule-bound, since “it is the social process in group life that creates and upholds the rules, not the rules that create and uphold group life” (pg. 19). Blumer does not rely on some notion of rules or roles because he is not concerned with forecasting the outcome of the encounter. Individuals may hesitate, procrastinate, be more ‘me’ oriented or more ‘I’ oriented, resist and fail to fit into joint actions (Blumer, 2004:97). Certainly there are problems with Blumer’s depiction of encounters. It is important to acknowledge that encounters are situated in particular cultural and material configurations; the subject is not voluntaristic (see Hammersley, 1989). It is also important to not let Blumer’s empiricism lead to qualitative realism (Baugh, 1990). Drawing from Blumer, however, we can emphasize that the interview respondent has a capability to shape the course of the research encounter, such that what exactly will be produced from the encounter is unanticipated. As Blumer (1969) stated:

...human beings act toward things on the basis of the meaning that the things have for them... the meaning of such things is derived, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows... [and] these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters (pg. 2).

Speech acts and conversations of gesture between researcher and respondent during encounters are an example of meaning-making in action.

The researcher practices an authority after the interview when it comes to writing up the encounter (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003), which means that reflexivity clearly has to do with the practice of representation. But what if we did away with understandings of research encounters that position the researcher as providing fixed rules for the game? Then we would

valorize the reflexivity of the respondent as well, and be able to claim that reflexivity is part of the relationality of the encounter. Put otherwise, the researcher does not have predetermined power in the interview encounter – the respondent exercises reflexivity in their interactions as well. However much scripts and roles guide our interactions with others, there is always an open tendency, such that the meanings that will be achieved from an encounter cannot be fully anticipated.

### **Propositions**

During the interview, both the researcher and the respondent fashion a sense of self through talk and gestures, and this sense of self may be a sexual and gendered self. A different set of gender dynamics are involved with women interviewing men compared to men interviewing men (Lee, 1997), which is complicated even further when sexuality is considered. How did the men I interviewed perform a sexual and gendered self during our encounter? How did I?

Much of the contemporary literature concerning gender and men pivots on the idea of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity, defined as the valorized masculinity in any particular context, is usually portrayed as competitive, individualistic, brawny, potentially violent and otherwise heterosexual (see Connell, 2001; Messerschmidt, 2000; Newburn and Stanko, 1994). Whereas men sometimes aggressively perform masculinity when being interviewed by women (Pini, 2005), in interviews with male-for-male internet escorts I did not experience hostility. Nor did I experience what could be construed as a masculinity contest. Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2002) comment on masculinity and interviews, arguing that masculinity is both displayed and threatened by the interview process. From this perspective, hegemonic masculinity pervades all relations between men. Oliffe and Mróz

(2005) likewise argue men are stoic during interviews, unable to talk about emotions and intimacy because of threats to masculinity. But these authors have not focused on the specificities of men interviewing other men as it concerns same sex relations, and therefore end up assuming that relations between queer men involve a contest over hegemonic masculinity. Dowsett and colleagues (2008) argue that meanings of sexuality amongst men who have sex with men are not determined by the pursuit of hegemonic masculinity:

Gay men are left out of the configuration of 'male', 'men' and the 'masculine' altogether...The prevailing formulation of masculinity represents a failure to engage with the creative meanings and embodied experiences evident in nonhegemonic sexual cultures (Dowsett et al., 2008:124-125).

Sexualized relations between men can run contrary to hegemonic masculinity. Valourized queer masculinities do not always pivot on competitive, individualistic, and brawny ideals. What I am arguing is that queer sexuality matters when men are interviewing men, and that hegemonic masculinity is not the only or the primary script operating in these scenarios.

When men interview men about same-sex relations, specificities of talk and gesture concerning queer sexualities must be responded to in a manner congruent with the respondent's definition of the situation, or the result could be a decline of rapport. If not wholly scripted by the pursuit of hegemonic masculinity, what are these specificities of talk and gesture concerning queer sexualities? Grenz (2005:2091) discusses how the encounter between escort and researcher occurs in a "context that creates the desire to confess," and what I will argue now is that the researcher is also invited to confess something about her or his self. In the beginnings of interviews, a first question was often posed to me "*are you gay?*" The question is a proposition, an invitation to create a certain image of myself, perhaps one the escort is more comfortable with, though I cannot know what the escort is expecting in advance of these speech acts. Acknowledging that both researcher and respondent affect

the course of interview encounters, the “*are you gay?*” question is fascinating not only for how it seeks out a singular identity declaration but also for how it momentarily flips over established researcher-respondent roles.

This confession of sexuality demanded from the researcher is constitutive of how the respondent bestows meaning and status upon the researcher as a sexuality insider or outsider. While I agree with Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2002) that sometimes it is strategically good to let the respondent ask the first question, the stakes are high with the “*are you gay?*” question since early in the interview I am not familiar with the respondent’s sense of self, what kind of language he uses to describe his relations. Responding one way or another could create a scenario where the respondent is more or less open. Often the “*are you gay?*” question was posed before I had a chance to talk to the respondent about confidentiality and anonymity, and before I had a chance to turn on the tape recorder. During my fieldwork I remember being struck with a predicament – what should I do, should I scramble like a desperate fool to start the tape?

The meaning of gay in this case is not fixed, it is up for grabs, it is contested. What gay will mean and how it will shape the interview is immanent to that encounter. I could not assume ‘gay’ had the same meaning for each respondent. Rather, I had to be aware of the differential and uneven language used by men concerning sexuality. Mazzei and O’Brien (2009) argue that an important part of reflexivity during the interview is knowing the gender and sex script a respondent is operating with and accurately following that script to create a successful definition of the situation. But how can researchers know the script prior to interaction? As I have argued above, we cannot assume that sexual scripts are determined by particular forms of masculinity, nor can we assume that there is a stable script operating as a

baseline throughout the encounter, since meanings are handled in, and modified through, interaction. Another way of putting this is that the encounter between researcher and escort has an open tendency, which is not scripted, insofar as what will be said and how what was said prior to any performative utterance influences later utterances. Claims regarding sexuality during interview encounters influence the breadth and depth of the speech acts and conversations of gesture that follow. These confessions of sexuality during interviews can be conceptualized as contributing to an immanent and “constitutive hermeneutic” (Walby, 2007) created by respondents, which shapes and influences the course of the interview. Using the ‘gay’ signifier in one way or another, even amongst self-identified gay men, can close down the dialogue, precisely because of the open tendency in the encounter as well as the volatility of any signifier. Introduction of a speech act or gesture into the conversation between researcher and respondent can have unanticipated consequences for the rest of the dialogue.

Some respondents were dismayed when I told them “I have slept with all kinds of people,” my standard and pre-planned answer to their “*are you gay?*” proposition. I wanted to be honest, and I wanted to provide the same answer to all escorts regardless of whether I knew a more coherent response would have further opened lines of communication between us. Rooke (2009) argues that a commitment to queer theory during the research encounter entails “an epistemological openness and attention to one’s own sexual subjectivity and the performativity of self”. Therefore, to respond in the affirmative would in some ways go against the focus on unstable identities in queer theory. In addition, if I did respond in the affirmative, it might have created a scenario where the respondent began to explain less and rely more on hypothetical “bonding ploys” (Schwalbe and Wolkomir, 2002) such as ‘you know what I mean,’ which I was hoping to avoid. If I responded as quite clearly queer, by

assuming the “cute young, dateable guy” performance of self (see Warren and Rasmussen, 1977), it could create a sexualized rapport. Sexualized rapport can be distracting and does not often generate the kind of dialogue a researcher is aiming at. Instead, I wanted to see how ambiguity concerning sexual identity would be interpreted in the research encounter.

With some other respondents, my hesitancy to position as gay per se was less a problem and opened up a new trajectory of dialogue:

I assume you’re gay (Ricky, Toronto).

K: I’ve had sex with...

Me too, I’ve had more sex with women than most of my straight friends (Ricky, Toronto).

In this exchange with Ricky, I had not even finished uttering my standard answer to the “*are you gay?*” proposition. The respondent read hesitancy right off of my body, and was able to impute a response that corresponded with what I was going to say. The body matters in research encounters insofar as gestures are communicative (see Seymour, 2007; Coffey, 1999). This anticipatory moment shaped the course of the interview, opening up a discussion of sexuality that moved beyond considering male-for-male relations in terms of a simple ‘gay’ versus ‘straight’ dichotomy.

Another example of how certain speech acts can shape the course of an interview regards my use of the term sex work to refer to the activities of male-for-male internet escorts. Some escorts accepted this term without question. They thought of what they did as work. However, when I was interviewing an escort in London (England) and I asked him at the start of the interview how he became involved in escorting, he responded “I do not like the word escort, it is too coy, prostitute, whore, something like that”. I decided to follow up:

K: What do you think of the terms sex work and sex workers?

Sounds like shat. It is moving away from prostitute, the connotations and the history, sex worker sounds quite cold and quite mechanical, but maybe that is what they are looking for, a word stripped of all kind of history. I would not want to be classified as a sex worker, I like words that are a bit more colourful, prostitute, whore (Jake, London).

Just like some of these men identified as 'gay' whereas others refuted that identity category, some of the men refuted the category of 'sex worker'. Researchers must be reflexively aware of how introducing a word into dialogue can have unanticipated consequences. Attributions of identity to the self or to another can create a constitutive hermeneutic in interviews, shaping the course of what will be said in the interactions that follow. Luckily, this escort was not offended by my inference, and the interview carried on for over two hours.

Whether it is sexual identity or work identity, the researcher needs to exercise care when assigning labels to the respondent. Not explicitly addressing the "*are you gay?*" question created a new set of meanings that either opened up the discussion of sexuality or else closed off the possibility of the respondent reading me as a sexuality insider. Even agreement on the word 'escort' could not be assumed. A chilly distance between researcher and respondent can emerge if the researcher is not careful about introducing words and gestures that might shape the encounter towards closure. Considerations concerning specificities of talk and gesture are especially important during the first 10 minutes of any interview encounter (OliFFE and Mróz, 2005). Again, this is because the meanings that will be achieved from an encounter cannot be fully anticipated, and the identities of the researcher and respondent are in part an outcome of the encounter rather than preset.

### **Sexualization**

Kevin, it was my pleasure meeting you. I look forward to hearing from you when you start writing. Take care of yourself. Oh and by the way....you are a sexy man! LOL, Harvey,  
Montréal

A crucial component of an interactionist approach to theorizing encounters and story telling is that these are joint actions (see Harding, 2006; Plummer, 1995). Encounters are dialogic. What we say and do as researchers influences what the respondents say and do and vice versa. The self, then, “is not to be seen as the ‘real’ or ‘inner’ truth of the respondents but as something constantly reproduced in the interview setting through the content of their stories as well as through our interaction” (Grenz, 2005:2103). When it comes to the sociology of sexuality and sex work, notions of the sexual self are contested, negotiated and altered in research encounters. Associating one’s self with the ‘gay’ signifier can have certain consequences for the rapport established between researcher and respondent, as can the purposive act of muddying the waters when it comes to the way we talk about our sexuality during interviews.

As much as the researcher positions as a sociologist, the respondent may position the researcher as a sex object. Sexualization of the encounter is a sort of cloud the respondent can introduce at any moment. My body as a researcher, especially in the interview encounter where it is being viewed and is moving in relation to the gestures of the respondent, is part of this milieu of sexualization. Gestures interpreted as non-sexual may be taken in another direction. For instance, I purposefully wore business attire for the interviews: black shirt, black pants, black shoes and horn-rimmed black glasses. Whereas the intention was to seem professional and asexual, my appearance could have been interpreted otherwise. Some of these men clearly wanted to turn the interview into more of a touching encounter. During interviews, I was often propositioned to receive sexual favours, as in the following:

K: Do you think you could walk me through, because not everyone does this kind of service, like a typical S&M scene?  
I could show you (Ricky, Toronto).

K: You could show me...

A simple S&M scene? Those words don't go together (Ricky, Toronto).

K: OK, yeah, not a typical S&M scene, but what exactly does the work of that consist of?

It is reasonable that escorts would break from the respondent role and sexualize me before, during or after the encounter, since a great deal of their work with clients involves sexualizing and being sexualized. I obviously bumbled the initial question, but his response "I could show you" came along with an impassioned glare from across the table. He had the curl of a smile forming in the corner of his mouth. With the "you could show me" response, my tone was clearly hesitant in a way that indicated not discomfort but that he had parted ways from the researcher-respondent interaction script. I read his response, an insertion of "simple" in place of "typical," as an attempt to reassert the script in our interaction, which he had attempted to dissolve. I then had an opportunity to reframe my question, such that I could indicate I was interested in talking about the tasks of S&M as a kind of work. Of his own accord, this escort actually apologized in an email the following day for deviating from the respondent role.

Qualitative research purports to 'get closer' to its objects of analysis, but how close should researchers get? Of course, sex with escorts would alter my understanding of them as people. But would it better help me understand how they talk about their work and their clients? There is considerable debate about sex and knowing in anthropology, which sociologists can learn from. Commenting on the pervasiveness of sex and sexuality during anthropological fieldwork, Altork (1995:121) contends that "protecting oneself from being 'touched' by the field, might be unnecessary in certain circumstances". Bolton (1995:149) adds that touching is an essential part of research: "I cannot imagine doing fieldwork without sex". Active participant observation can extend a researcher's understanding of sexual

activity. Lambevski (1999:400) summarizes this approach: “one cannot observe someone else’s sexual desire from a safe, detached, distance. One has to experience it in order to understand it”. But not all research with sex workers takes sex as the object of analysis, and so, given that my research is about how escorts organize their work and make sense of their relationships with clients, it is not clear how much having sex with escorts would have added. Nor do all anthropologists hold that sharing one’s sex or sexuality is necessary. Commenting on her experiences of marrying and then divorcing a key informant, Irwin (2006:106) writes that “becoming intimately close to setting members can do more harm than good”. For this reason, Carrier (1999) had sex with men associated with the research setting but not with respondents. La Pastina (2006) argues that there can be repercussions for sharing one’s queer self with others in research settings where relations between men are not condoned. Moreover, as Brewis (2005) and Bernstein (2007a) note, researchers who study sexuality and sex work can be stigmatized in academia for getting too close to a touchy subject. How close one gets in the field really depends on what the object of analysis is. To touch or not to touch hinges on whether there is an epistemological gain. Just as preventing oneself from being ‘touched’ by the field might be unnecessary, getting close to respondents for the sake of it is not a requisite of reflexive research either.

What we say and do as researchers during the interview encounter moves the dialogue in certain directions. For instance, Grenz (2005:2095) “had to take care not to be too friendly and not to have too much rapport, which in other interview settings would be considered a necessary prerequisite for successful research”. During interviews, I too felt I was policing my own gestures and speech acts to hinder respondents’ sexualization of me, not by drawing explicit attention to what the escort was doing or saying, but, in a more

Goffmanian sense, by trying to redefine the situation as a research encounter through my own gestures and talk. A very touchy gesture was the hug. I would often hug the men after handing them remuneration when saying goodbye. Many times this was taken as an indication that I wanted to change settings and get closer, whereas I meant the hug as a parting sign. After hugging at the end of our interview, one escort in Toronto walked me to my hostel, requesting more hugs at each red light we waited at. When he suggested it would be good if he accompanied me to my room, I had to explain that I was not in a position to have intimate relations with respondents. However, I did not want to offer a distanced parting sign such as a handshake – the encounter seemed to demand something kinder.

Other times, at the end of interviews, escorts asked me to come back to their house and “hear more, first hand” as Jeff from New York put it. It was easy enough to say I was late for another interview or explain that the line between client and researcher could not be breached. One might assume that sexualization was more common when I interviewed escorts in their homes. However, this was not the case, perhaps because these men did not think of their homes as a sexual setting. My point is that any smile or movement of the hand can be interpreted as sexualization in research encounters between men, even if it is not intended to be.

Sexualization can start before the actual meeting of respondent and research. Grenz (2005) reported that sometimes sexualization began to surface early on with initial phone correspondence. I experienced a similar set of ethical issues. Some respondents, it seemed, honestly mistook my clearly scripted cover letter to be an alluring note from a client, probably without even reading it, and so responded to me with a note about prices and services. I deleted these messages. Some responses, however, were ambiguous. For instance,

one escort wrote back “let me know when you’re in town, we will set it up”. In such cases, I would respond again with the scripted cover letter, hoping that he would read it and write back indicating an interest in the interview. One of the first respondents I heard back from, calling by phone in response to an ad in a local newspaper, tried very hard to create a sexual scene. He would leave messages on my telephone at the University such as “I can give you head after we talk, you can fuck me if you want”. I refused to respond to his calls. He would call three or four times a day, and did so for a week. When he continued to leave sexualizing messages, I eventually had to take a stern tone with him to communicate that our phone correspondence had to end because I thought he was being inconsiderate and was missing the point of why I wanted to talk to him. By not being too friendly, I was trying to portray an identity as a professional sociologist conducting a rigorous study concerning male-for-male internet escorting, but he configured me as a client. The point is that respondents can read different identities onto us before and during interviews, subverting our attempts to position as researcher (Aléx and Hammarström, 2008; Nunkoosing, 2005). Researchers are able to present multiple selves to respondents, but this does not mean our indications will be interpreted as we wish.

Another time, I placed an ad in the same local newspaper trying to find clients of male-for-male internet escorts to talk to about their experiences of purchasing sexual services. One man called, and we spoke for about 20 minutes. He suggested that he was deriving pleasure from our conversation, that “even just talking about it with you kind of makes me hard”. He asked me if “I get off” from the interviews. I explained the purpose of the research, and asked him if he wanted to keep talking. He said no, hung up the phone, and we never spoke again. When sexualization did occur, a Goffmanian concern for roles was a

constant in how I negotiated these interactions, insofar as I had to rebuff my position as researcher through verbal and non-verbal communications. Part of this decision not to be 'touched' by the field was to prevent the stigma that would accompany such a deviation in research design. Yet, despite these presentations of self as sociologist, sexualization continued. In email correspondence after one interview, I wrote to the respondent as I did with them all:

Kevin here. Thanks for meeting with me yesterday. It was great to talk to you about your work. Hope all is well. Kevin

Roberto, from New York, wrote back:

Pleasure was mine.  
Sorry I had to leave and thank you for the tip.  
If there is anything else I can do for you let me know...I would love to.

This escort had to leave our interview encounter because a client had called his cell phone and asked if he was available. He said yes, and left a minute later. There was no overt sexualization during the encounter. In his email, however, the remuneration of \$35 I gave to him is construed as a tip, the kind a client would leave after a sexual encounter. "If there is anything else I can do for you let me know...I would love to" could imply, in this context, further elaborating on what he had said about his work through written correspondence, but it could also imply sexual favours. The script of researcher and respondent is broken down, although the meaning here is ambiguous. In this relationship between ambiguity and power, meaning swerves or follows an unanticipated trajectory.

Understandings of sexuality are both produced and contested in encounters. Grenz (2005:2111) writes of her interviews with male clients of female sex workers "instead of simply giving men an opportunity to talk about commercial sex, the interview provided space to discursively reproduce sexual identity on both levels, through the actual content of their

stories as well as through our interaction,” and the same is true of my interviews with male-for-male internet escorts. One proviso, however, is that discourses of sexuality are not simply floating around as suggested by the metaphor of preset scripts. Who is doing the interview, therefore, matters for how the self is constructed through talk and gestures; my own body and tenor was involved in meaning-making and identity construction during these encounters.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

This chapter contributes to debates concerning epistemology and interviews by showing how confessions and attributions of identity by the researcher can create a constitutive hermeneutic that shapes the research encounter as it happens. By not affirming a fixed identity in response to the “*are you gay?*” question, I sometimes opened up an opportunity to talk about sexuality beyond binary identities, although sometimes such purposeful ambiguity closed off the dialogue and discouraged rapport. Homoeroticism cannot be annulled from the encounter when men interview men about same-sex relations; swerves towards sexualization continually enter through gestural conduct and speech acts. Sometimes indications to reaffirm the escort-researcher boundary are necessary, which speaks to Goffman’s conceptualization of roles as integral to encounters.

The logic of the research process concerning sex work mimics the logic of the lure between sex workers and their clients. Clients contact escorts by email. A time, place and rate is agreed upon. The encounter occurs. The money is exchanged, and the encounter ends. Much the same could be said about my relations with the escorts I interviewed. I contacted them by email. We settled on a time, place and rate of remuneration. We met, chatted, and parted ways. Yet, as suggested by Blumer, the encounter is not predetermined by a script; the meanings of an encounter are produced through interaction itself. The researcher has an

agenda-setting power (Hoffman, 2007), yet the respondent can swerve the encounter towards propositions and sexualization, which results from meaning in the making.

Here I have focused on the specifics of men interviewing men regarding same-sex relations. Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2002) argue it is common for men to position themselves as autonomous, in control, and rational during interviews. Other scholars (such as Presser, 2005; Grenz, 2005; Pini, 2005; Lee, 1997) have commented on how men sexualize female researchers during the interview. I did not find that the male-for-male internet escorts I interviewed were trying to position as autonomous, in control, or rational during interviews. There are specificities of queer sexualities that matter in research encounters, such that it is difficult to make generalizing claims about what interviewing 'men' is like as if all men share some underlying attribute that manifests during research encounters. While we can assume that interviews provide an occasion for both the researcher and the respondent to fashion a sense of self through their talk and gestures, we should not assume that men are always in pursuit of hegemonic masculinity (Jefferson, 2002). Furthermore, the sexuality of men cannot be treated as an extension of gender. If gender identity is not stable during an encounter, neither is sexual identity. In other words, "the very idea that types of people called homosexuals or gays or lesbians can be called up for interview becomes a key problem" (Plummer, 2007:21). Discourses concerning sexuality are not as abstract and fixed as researchers often profess, as sexuality is produced in encounters through interaction.

Theoretical assumptions have methodological consequences. When we treat interviews "not as question-and-answer sequences but as interactive sites for meaning-making, interviewers can no longer be regarded as passive listeners and neutral recorders" (Järvinen, 2001:280). Probyn (1993) has called for a way of speaking about sexuality that

neither privileges the researcher (as in self-indulgent accounts of reflexivity) nor speaks for the other: the way to do this is to emphasize the interactionist features of the encounter. The reflexivity of the respondent, then, is as important as the reflexivity of the researcher in shaping the conversation to come (Riach, 2009). Rooke (2009) argues that more research is required to understand the erotics of knowledge production, and hopefully this chapter has contributed to that reflexively queer ambition in small ways. If researchers do not take seriously the idea that meanings are handled in, and modified through, interpretive processes, they fail to consider the impact of their bodies and words in the research encounter.

## **CHAPTER SIX – STORIED ENCOUNTERS, OR TALKING ABOUT THE SELF AFTER COMING TOGETHER WITH OTHERS**

A number of propositions concerning the encounter put forward in Chapter Three were concretized during Chapter Five through a discussion of my interview interactions with escorts. Chapter Five demonstrated that my approach to research methods puts emphasis on what is produced out of these encounters. From pre-interview communication, to the interview, to post-interview correspondence, to production and analysis of the transcript, to writing and editing and speaking about the research process – all research is grounded in relational encounters. In Chapter Four, however, I claimed that interview and narrative-based research only allows readers and researchers to access a storied version of the encounter. I therefore want to add one final proposition to this conceptualization of the encounter:

*The encounter affects the stories we can tell about our relations.*

We do not forget what our bodies have done, even as it regards the most itinerant and anonymous encounter. Encounters live on. The most meandering encounter can be formative for biographies as well as the stories people tell about their relations. As Butler (2004a:172) puts it, “the body that speaks its deed is the same body that did its deed”. I have stated earlier that sociology needs an interactionist approach to sexuality capable of theorizing the unanticipated elements of the encounter.

Not only is research produced through encounters, but the elaboration and story telling that follows is crucial (see Snow and Anderson, 1993). Elaboration concerning past encounters requires interpretation, and interpretation is fundamental to story telling insofar as it is the communicative link between past and future. Earlier I suggested that emphasizing corporeality in the sociology of sexuality is a tactic for unraveling the privileged masculine subject that sociology has operated with for so long. But this leads to a predicament: what

can social scientists ‘know’ about corporeality given the limits of qualitative research, especially interview-based research. The touching encounter exists in interaction; the storied encounter elaborates on this interaction. Plummer (1995) anticipates this idea of stories that stem from bodies coming together in *Telling Sexual Stories*. Sexual stories are produced in “social contexts by embodied concrete people experiencing the thoughts and feelings of everyday life” (pg. 16). ‘Coming out’ stories and HIV/AIDS stories, for instance, are only possible to tell at particular historical moments. The coming out story is ultimately told about who one thinks they really are (pg. 86), yet the community one is situated in provides context shaping the texture of the story: “the notion of gay identity only becomes a possibility once there has been a breakdown in traditional notions of the self. In the past, the possibility to choose to possess a gay identity simply did not exist” (pg. 93). Moreover, sexual stories do not always focus on sex alone, but can be oriented towards making sense of how sex intersects with work (Rickard, 2001).

This chapter introduces the reader to the respondents and their stories. The male-for-male internet escorts I spoke with all offered strikingly different life history narratives, as compared to one another, but also as compared to the kinds of stories that people in other sectors of the sex industry offer. It is important to give these life history narratives their own space because otherwise they may become lost in the analysis of substantive topics such as work, sex, and corporeality (which the following chapters engage with).

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, this chapter challenges stereotypical understandings of men who have sex with men and men who sell sex. For instance, Marlowe (1997) suggests male sex work is different from female sex work first and foremost because “many gay men have learned not only to accept but also take pride in sexual deviance” (pg.

141). Marlowe also argues that “boys who engage in casual sex are considered to have a normal and healthy sex drive” (pg. 142). That is, they are not stigmatized but envied. Marlowe argues that, contrary to the idea that male sex workers are exploited, male sex workers cash in on and exploit their older and less attractive male clients. These comments about men who have sex with men and men who sell sex are essentializing. One purpose of this chapter is to emphasize that sexual stories are often only marginally about sex. Consistent with the literature referred to as queer theory reviewed in Chapter Two, neither sexual identity nor identity at all is evoked in sexual stories per se. Sexual stories are instead about intimate and corporeal relations we have with each other; the many layers of stories undo any fixed sense of identity.

Adding another layer of complexity to understandings of men who have sex with men and men who sell sex, the second aim of this chapter is to discuss male-with-male sexuality in relation to aging. As mentioned in Chapter Two, queer theory has tended to neglect the aging sexualized body. Even critical gerontology has not fully theorized how aging bodies delimit agency and a sense of self (Tulle, 2008; Gilleard and Higgs, 2000). This chapter draws from literature concerning aging and male sexuality (Jones and Pugh, 2005; Katz and Marshall, 2003; Marshall and Katz, 2002) to understand how male-for-male internet escorts navigate aging and deal with the failures of their bodies. Aging bodies are associated with illness, frailty and other breakdowns of the body. Sexuality and old age are understood to be incompatible, although Vares (2009) argues there is a gendered double standard in this regard where the sexuality of the older woman’s body is negated. González (2007) argues that older men become socially sorted and stigmatized according “age-graded sexualities” and age-related tropes in gay communities (e.g. ‘chicken hawk,’ ‘daddy’). Exclusion between men

who have sex with men on the basis of aging points to one of the contradictions of sexuality discussed by Jackson and Scott (2004). Sexual inclusion is called for, sexuality is flagged as a site of struggle, yet aging men who have sex with men have been thoroughly neglected by sociologists of sexuality as well as many pro-sex advocacy groups.

This chapter is organized in three parts. First, I offer life history vignettes for five of the respondents, one from each city in which I conducted multiple interviews. Second, I share some narratives concerning the keeping of secrets and the more unfavourable aspects of the working sex lives of these men, including stigma. Finally, I discuss how these men talk about aging in relation to escorting, since aging fundamentally marks a temporal shift in the way people understand their life story and their bodies in relation to others. One key difference that marks a sense of belonging amongst men who have sex with men is age. The stories these men have told about aging are stories about what their bodies can do and how their bodies often fail them when it comes time to touch. In the following section I discuss some of the life history narratives of a few male-for-male internet escorts to understand how they make sense of their work in relation to their life course. These men all have varying biographies, work in different cities, and are at diverse stages of their careers as escorts.

## **Five Lives**

### *Jacques*

I met Jacques at a coffee shop north of the gay village in Montréal. He insisted we meet at this particular coffee shop known in his neighbourhood for being a community organizing centre. I quickly learned from talking to Jacques that his escorting work is connected to his life as an activist, or, put differently, his life as an activist and his life as an

escort emerged at the same time. At age 22, he was one of the younger escorts I spoke with.

Here is Jacques from Montréal sharing a narrative about starting out and staying in escorting:

It's been three years now. I started when I was 19. I started because there was a student strike in 2005 and I lost my apartment; I lost everything for participation in the strike. And there I met gay anarchists in the strike who were doing sex work and were living by it. For the first time we discussed work, it was the first time I was thinking about what I want to do. And like I also had my first jobs being paid minimum wage and having to work 30 hours a week just to pay my rent ... I decided to let up school after the strike. So I would have been stuck at this point of jobs, like I would not be able to get better jobs because I did not want to go at first to school. So it was a way to make much money and not work that much. Having work that was full of human relationships, you're producing something but it's a relation, so it's different. I was good for it. And the first time I did it I did not place an ad or go on the street or like not that kind of thing but I did a massage for a guy once and he proposed to pay me for it as work. And he called me back the week after proposing another massage. I said, 'OK' and so it became like a treat, and I discovered I really like to do it and it was like not hard it was not a big deal.

Jacques and I chatted for hours about topics such as anarchism and sexuality, the politics of sex and the meaning of work. He took the politics of his work very seriously. He is a member of the Pink Panthers, an anarchist social movement group concerning sexuality. Talking about the Pink Panthers, Jacques says:

Basically it's to get sex work recognized as work, not that much to have the state interfere with what we are doing and between our clients and ourselves but just to like not criminalize, offer social services so HIV won't get everywhere. It's not that contradictory to work, like I'm living on the fact that sexuality is made a commodity as any other. But at the same time like I don't think it's sex work that is not good, I think it's work. As long as I have to work to live I prefer sex work to anything else. And with the Pink Panthers it's more than that. We get out. We're doing movies; we're doing some demonstrations too. We attacked Harper when he came to Montréal. Queer radicals and people who have social critique must have reflection in particular on sexuality together.

The entry of Jacques into massage work and then escorting was accompanied by a swerve in his life course. After leaving school he had come to live communally amongst other activists; activism informed his thoughts about work, which informed his work practices and the way he tried to establish relationships with clients. He was very concerned that clients be aware of

what they wanted and what was possible for him to provide, because he did not want to be exploitative. As he says, “my work is to make slavery a fun experience by sexualizing alienation”. He did not want to live in Montréal’s gay village because he found it too pretentious and geared towards stereotypical body images. Few if any of the escorts were as politically involved as Jacques. Of all the escorts I spoke with, only Jacques offered a critique of capitalism at the same time as he forwarded a notion of the collective labourer and a sense of solidarity with other sex workers across gender boundaries and social class. Jacques was aware of his class position as well as the class position of his clients and how this situated him compared to other sex workers.

### *Bob*

Escorts have very diverse experiences of starting out with this work. I met Bob from Ottawa in a coffee shop. I remember riding my bike way east of the downtown – it was a long ride. Bob was late and I was waiting around, stretching in the grass along the boulevard, hoping I was not getting stood up. He arrived. We quickly went to a different location for the interview because he recognized someone inside the shop. Compared to Jacques, Bob’s first years of sex work were quite different:

I started about four years ago. It was with the drug trade actually at first and it went from there along, you know, someone I knew was doing it connected me with a few people and taught me about going here and going there. And so I went for a couple of years like that and I was just burned right out and couldn’t keep going. I sobered up and just kind of kept it, you know I left for six months and then considered running it as a business you know much more stable and like you know more like an escort service rather than just cruising around. And it’s really taken off, actually I’ve done quite well since I started like that so I can’t complain.

As Bob put it, his start with sex work had him “homeless on the street, wrecked on dope, selling my ass, and there was no help”. The vocabulary Bob used to describe what he does now was more entrepreneurial than the narrative of Jacques. Bob works in Ottawa, which

according to escorts is a more closeted city than other cities where I spoke with escorts.

Ottawa is a persnickety city compared to the sexy and seedy Montréal – this difference is how escorts narrate their sense of place in Ottawa. Ottawa is also a government town, and many of Bob's clients are military officials, bureaucrats, lawyers, government employees or debutants from abroad. Bob went from having some run-ins with police over drugs to being a traveling, professional escort who is paid to snuggle and sleep with Ottawa's elite. Because he also meets many clients who are in Ottawa on official business from out of town, he has established a list of contacts the world over. These clients sometimes invite him to work the weekends in resorts or other destinations. Yet the result is not always fun in the sun:

A regular of mine, one of my first ones ever, a nice guy, he took me to Mexico with him, and he dropped dead of a heart attack on the beach while I was there. I didn't know what to do. His son was my age and I actually knew him outside of the whole thing and we got along so he came down and dealt with it all but thank God type of thing because I ended up like what do I do? What happens here? Am I stuck in Mexico. He's got all the tickets and everything. It actually worked out really well and his son knew everything too so it wasn't like a hidden thing so it got dealt with but after that I was a little nervous about doing trips with anybody anywhere - it's too bad but you know shit happens. You could see the few weeks I had seen him before, he was stressed out getting angrier and angrier and started working from home rather than going into his office.

This narrative is significant for two reasons. First, it describes how interwoven the lives of the escort and the client are, which is a significantly different picture than the stereotypical image of the sex worker. Some sex work scholars conceptualize sex workers as performing a detached customer service (see Sanders, 2004), of having no connection to the client, and as severing their private life from their working life. Here, Bob demonstrates a concern for the client's life, which came to an unfortunate end during an extended sex work session out of country. This concern leads to a second point. Bob's biography is fundamentally linked to escorting. Escorts cannot simply block out what happens at work; the public life of their

working self cannot be bracketed out from the so-called private self, which means that the division between public and private self that some sex work scholars (e.g. Sanders, 2008, 2005; Browne and Minichiello, 1995) focus on is only part of the story. Work is usually a place where attempts are made to conceal sexuality; however, as discussed in Chapter Eight, with male-for-male internet escorting the ‘private’ of the sexual and the ‘public’ of work are often folded into one another.

### *Ricky*

Ricky’s life history narratives also demonstrate how interwoven escorting is with biography. He is a prominent figure in Toronto’s Church Street gay village area. Ricky also manages a store supplying leather bondage gear, a job he took on but is not sure how long he will stay with. He has spent time volunteering for sex activist groups in Toronto as a sex-positive, safe-sex advocate. At age 39, Ricky was not the oldest escort in this study, but his 13 years in the industry made him one of the longest serving escorts I spoke with. Ricky worked as an escort pre-internet and post-internet, and so he has many informative stories to share about changes in labour process inside and outside of the sex industry. He also has a lot of work history outside escorting to compare with escorting:

Basically I was working a job that I hated which has happened most of my adult life. I tend to just not fit into corporate type jobs. I’ve done them. I’m generally otherwise in retail management. I’ve gone to college for it mind you. I went to college later, like when I was around 30. Even at a young age I would start off doing jobs mostly in sales and retail and that kind of stuff and I get bored easily and also I’m not good for corporate structure. I like the money that they offer but I can’t follow the rules that are untrusting of people, I find a lot of corporate jobs waste a lot of time doing stupid things that don’t actually help selling at all. So anyway I left the job that was my first job ever, downtown Toronto, one of my first jobs. And actually I was working for a sex shop and at that time I started seeing a man named [...]. You may come across him in your travels because he’s quite a big name in prostitution and prostitutes’ rights. He was a big activist in his day. He’s passed away since...while I was seeing him. He did it all his life. He did porn as well. He didn’t get me into it at all. I didn’t tell him I wanted to start doing it. I went and joined an escort agency without him even knowing it. Just to get an income going, and obviously he said, ‘Why didn’t you

ask me? I would have helped you get into it more easily' and then did it for a couple of years, at that time I was 23. Then I got a job again because I got bored of that because back then it was all done by phone and cell phones were not around, it involved sitting at home all day waiting for calls. Most of the calls were time wasters.

For Ricky, the time spent on the computer or on the phone arranging the encounter with the client can be boring (as boring as any other work). In contrast, the touching encounter itself is something Ricky enjoys. He treats these touching encounters as an extension of his sex life. As his narratives in Chapter Eight indicate, there is fluidity between his work sex life and his so-called 'private' sex life, mirroring a broader consistency amongst male-for-male internet escorts. The sex of their work is often the sex of their lives. Though their sex lives and their work lives overlap, there can be difficulties in achieving a relationship with another man:

Do they want a boyfriend who's an escort? I'm dating a man right now, very loosely dating, like we've become good friends, we have good fun sex. We like each other a lot. He's attractive, he's intelligent. He's making about 100K a year. When he met me, I have a job now, but when he met me I was an escort and I'm worried is he going to use me for a while for sex and have a good time, which isn't a bad thing, I was there for that in the beginning and then say, 'Yeah I can't date a man like this'. Or not, so I have to worry about that. Is it possible to be able to fall in love with me with my career choice right now or not? So that is a big deterrent for wanting to be honest about what I do with someone in my life.

Ricky's story brings up an issue that is common amongst male-for-male internet escorts: keeping secrets. Secrets need to be kept to ensure the anonymity of clients, but also, as Ricky's narrative points out, to manage who knows what about him in Toronto's gay village. During our interview at a pub on Church Street, many people would wave to Ricky, ask him what he was up to. Our chat went on for over three hours not only because of these interludes but because Ricky really liked talking about his sexual encounters in great detail. As the Chapter Five argued, the interview encounter can be a confessional opportunity. Being notorious and popular in downtown Toronto feels good, but, as Ricky's narrative indicates, being known can be a hindrance to setting up relationships outside of escorting.

*Roberto*

Living in downtown Manhattan is expensive. Roberto has spent a lot of time going from job to job, not out of boredom but economic necessity. His family still resides in Brazil and he sometimes sends money back to support them. His mother knows what he does to earn the money. We spoke in Roberto's Manhattan apartment. His apartment was a mess because he was painting, so we sat on a couch covered by drop sheets. The way Roberto talks about his escorting being 'on and off' reflects a consistency amongst male-for-male internet escorts. These men work as escorts in conjunction with other jobs they hold, a result of the individuated labour process of male-for-male internet escorting that I discuss further in Chapter Seven. Some men leave escorting and take on full-time work. But they usually come back. The labour process is such that male escorts can pick up more clients when they want:

I'm 44 now and I started when I was 27, but it's been on and off. I stopped it and I went back and sometimes I would be doing this part time and doing something else. I've always been legal here. I arrived in '86 and by '88 I had already a work permit, so I worked, I used to work in restaurants. It was hard work and even back then people used to look at me and say, they thought I was already doing this. I guess because you're Brazilian, young and good looking so they assumed that I was doing it. And I thought, when I was younger I thought it was flattering because I never saw myself like that. And I actually thought, 'hey he thinks I can do that'. But little did I know. I worked really hard and eventually I was working the Upper East Side, this Greek restaurant making good money and some drama happened and the owners was jerks and they stiffed me my tips, and I lost my job. So I collected unemployment and I went to look for work but when I went to look for work they were very strict. I started getting facial hair and they don't want that. They wanted clean cut. So I started, and a friend of mine said to me, 'Why don't you try hustling, you know you can make money?' I knew guys that did it and the money, as much as I made good money in restaurants it's not the same amount of money. And at the same time I met my lover. Actually I had already met him for about three months when this guy told me that. So I started, I tried and I said to my lover, listen, because my lover was, he was American. He owned his apartment, he was vice-president of a company and I mean his life was set. And I was like, you know, I don't know if this is going to work but if it works that's what it's going to be because you've got your life and I have to get my life. I need money. So it worked out. And I was with him for five years so I wasn't doing as much but you know I was doing that was pretty much full time, but I wouldn't do it when I was with him. After we broke up, then I went to college. That's

what I was doing because I needed the money to go to college. Then when I got out of college in 2001 I continued doing it and started freelancing graphic design. It's been on and off.

As with many other male-for-male internet escorts I spoke with, there is a boyfriend in the background. This presence of a relationship does not mean, however, that sex with the boyfriend becomes 'real' sex and the sex at work becomes feigned. As I argued in Chapter Eight, not all of these men make a distinction between their 'private' sex life and sex they have at work. Roberto suggests that escorting was his way out of the cycle of hardship that came with being an immigrant working on the lower rungs of Manhattan's restaurant circuit. He put himself through college but still works as an escort and says he will do it until his clothing company gets off of the ground. Roberto is not ashamed about his work and spoke strongly about safe-sex politics, though he is not part of any activist group.

#### *Jake*

At the time of the interview, Jake was living in London, but he grew up in Scotland. He had been having sexual encounters with men for several years, mostly in parks and public washrooms. Itinerant sex is often sought after by men liking sex with men because of the ambiguity and excitement that sex with strangers involves. But park sex can also be terrifying due to the presence of police keen to make arrests. The sexual encounters of male-for-male internet escorts are also itinerant – they do not always follow pervasive sexual scripts and sometimes aim towards uncertainty. Jake's story about entering escorting evinces this itinerant and unpredictable character of male-with-male sex. When Jake talks about 'doing it for cash,' he means escorting is in many ways an extension of the kinds of sexual encounters he was previously engaged in, those marked by anonymity and itinerant meetings:

The very first time I had slept with a bloke, it just kinda happened by chance, the first or second bloke I had met, someone I had already slept with beforehand, no money involved, but the second time around he wanted a bit of work done, he wanted his flat

painted, so the one time I had met him before was to do master slave domination, corporal punishment, I was suggesting that he pay me, so it became more, there was a weekend of role play and he paid me for that, the corporal punishment. Not sure if that was the first time it was for cash, but the second time it was a guy I had slept with before and we were trying to meet up again and we were not able to, and then he suggested that he pay me for it so that we could both get what we wanted, because by that point on my profile online it said that I would be interested to do it for cash, so we met up again, master domination, him being in the more dominant role, so it was the stuff we had done before, the last time we had met, but then he paid me after. Those were the first two times. Then I did not really do it, I wanted to but I was sleeping on a friend's couch, I had accommodations before but that came to an end, and I still wanted to stay in London, so I crashed on his couch for a couple months, it was difficult, it was not a stable set up, I did not pursue it completely and I did not have access to a computer, I only had online access in an internet café, so I was not online often, so it was not stable enough and there was not enough opportunity. I had an office job for a couple months, I was doing the medical experiments, and then I said I wanted to try it again, so I set up the profile online and I guess the first proper work would be then, a bloke I met online who said he was looking for a massage, said he would pay for it, and it went on from there. That was the first time after I set up. That was the first proper one. The other two times, it was more opportunistic.

Jake now lives with his partner, who is fully aware of and supports his work. Jake's lack of stability at that point in his life course made it tough for him to do the work regularly. Not having access to the internet made it difficult to arrange encounters, although living in London provided Jake with a market for his interest in bondage activities. Place matters as it regards sex and sexuality (see Appendix A).

The preceding life history narratives describe starting out in male-for-male internet escorting. All of the escorts have diverse stories about how they entered the work. The life history narratives of men who have sex with men are often varied (Seidman, 2002).

Narratives are about biographies, not simply one's past but one's self in the making.

### **Keeping Secrets and Feeling 'Washed Up'**

In the previous section, I introduced the reader to a few of the escorts who shared their stories with me as it regards their work and sex lives. I wanted to provide a sense of

where the men are in their life course, how they came to male-for-male internet escorting, and how it has influenced their worldview. These issues will be explored in the impending chapters. However, before moving on to those discussions, it is key to gain a sense of the downside of escorting. As suggested in Chapter Four, the social and economic position of these men is such that they do not often discuss issues of violence<sup>21</sup> and criminalization that on-street female and transgendered workers face. Yet, contrary to some stereotypical understandings of male sex workers that view these men as not experiencing stigma (see Marlowe, 1997) escorting can have negative impacts on their sense of self. This next section is about secret-keeping and stigma in the work of male escorting. There is pressure to keep quiet since if the story gets out, stigmatization can result.

### *Sam*

Sam moved to Ottawa from the Caribbean in the late 1990s. He has been working as an escort and masseur part-time for more than a decade. When he first started out in escorting he was unable to be honest with his partner. He was keeping a secret from the partner:

My first boyfriend, when I was abroad, we had been four years together. I was doing it before I met him. I never told him I did it. I stopped advertising because I knew I could not be available as much. We were spending all of our nights together. We started living together. A couple of blocks apart. I could not then have guests in the evening, first of all, so all my guests would not come unless they could come before ten o'clock. I was not taking any new calls, I was only taking calls from old regulars who still had my number. When I lost customers I was not doing anything to look for

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<sup>21</sup> West (1992) found that male sex workers, especially young and on-street workers, faced high levels of violence. Compared to other sex workers, especially on-street female and transgendered workers, male-for-male escorts face little risk of violence. Harvey from Montréal says "I have never really been screwed, I have been lucky that way," meaning he has never faced violence at work or been stiffed for his fee. In the few instances where violence was mentioned during the interviews, the escorts themselves were the aggressors:

I was with a guy and we got to his place, he had like dogs on me, like two dogs and I'm not really like an animal person...I was like, 'Yo get these dogs like yo I'm not playing with you. Like get these dogs'. I was like yelling about the dogs but I was just like saying it in a joking manner, like 'I'm about to hurt these dogs if you don't get them off'. So he was just like, 'Oh you're not going to hurt nobody'. He was like 'as a matter of fact, you can just have a little bit of money and get out'. And I didn't like that because I traveled far to see him ...he lived in like Staten Island and you know we called a taxi there and I was just like upset for him to want to just give me like \$20 to get out you know so it got pretty ugly and you know we got into a fight because I wanted more money (Mike, New York).

new ones. When I was coming to Canada he found I replied to one ad of a guy, because we knew when I was leaving it was the end of the relationship since he could not come to Canada with me. I used his computer<sup>22</sup> to reply to this ad. I asked the person to call on my cell phone not to reply to the message, but he replied instead of calling. My partner saw it. I was screwed. His reaction was heavy. 'Escort, you want to be an escort, is that what you want to do when we split!'

For Sam, 'trouble' refers to the association of escorting with drug use, sexual health problems and poverty. When the story gets out, the reaction can be "heavy" not only because people associate sex work with depravity but because keeping secrets implies keeping others out of one's life.<sup>23</sup> The secret can lead to breakdowns in bonds when one keeper of the secret confesses (Simmel, 1950). Male-for-male internet escorts are good at keeping secrets, because there is pressure for escorts to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of their clients. Escorting is tense because on the one hand secrets must be kept, but on the other hand there is a want to confess and sometimes a need to 'come out' as a worker. In this context, 'coming out' refers not only to coming out as a sexual minority, but also as a sex worker (Squire, 2000; Plummer, 1995). Managing the demands of others with whom one is in a relationship, however, can be trouble when the secret of sex work stands between them.

### *Tyler*

Tyler has been escorting off and on since he moved to Ottawa in 1999. He escorted full-time when he could not find other work. Recently, he found a full-time job, and escorting became part-time work. Though he did not dislike escorting and saw it as somewhat

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<sup>22</sup> Commenting on the connection between internet use and anonymity, Sean from Toronto says "I had a client once who had a thing for jeans, loved jeans and he was calling me and wanted to know if I was available on Saturday. But I didn't know that he was on my Facebook, so I saw he made a comment on my Facebook, on my wall. And I was like 'ooh, fuck, DELETE!'"

<sup>23</sup> Not all escorts felt that they had to keep what they do secret from their partners. As Donald from New York puts it: "I have a very supportive partner who was a little cautious at first about my trying this but we talked about it and thought you know it could be an interesting experiment just to see how it worked and to see how much I was able to make and then to also hear about it afterwards and that was a real turn on for him to hear about, to hear the description of each session afterwards. Not everybody is in a position like that, where they have a partner that's actively interested and supportive of exploring something like this and being I guess being part of it but not in the sense of going along on a session but not having to hide it".

enjoyable, Tyler did feel escorting was cutting him off from some contacts in Ottawa's gay community. He also had a complicated history with escorting because he and an ex-boyfriend had started together in order to make ends meet and pay rent. Tyler continues to keep some secrets to manage these conflicting feelings concerning his work:

I do not feel guilty about what I am doing, but I often think I would feel terrible if my mother or father or immediate family found out what I do by some set of circumstance, they would be very quick to judge, I know they would judge me, but aside from being found out by family as most escorts do not want that to think I do not feel bad about it and I am fine. Ever since I was 19, I was in love with River Phoenix and I saw *My Own Private Idaho*.<sup>24</sup> And even though I did not want to be in the fringes like he was in that film, I just thought, there is such a mythology surrounding hustlers and their clients that I thought, could I do that and why do I want to do that, I am not a shrink so I do not know why I love it and why I do it, but I always thought it would be cool. To be paid to have sex. When you eliminate the money you are having sex with somebody. Most people do not think that way.

Tyler starts this narrative by talking about the secrets he keeps from his family. For him, the shame involved in his family knowing would be unbearable. He is good at keeping secrets, however, and goes on to tell a rather romantic story about his work and locates his affinity for the work in the image of River Phoenix. Yet not all the narratives in Tyler's story fit in the romantic genre. He had started escorting with an ex-boyfriend to pay the rent one month; escorting, casual drug use and heavy drinking then ensued and they split up. As Tyler puts it, "we had a tumultuous two year relationship, I had to go to jail, we had a violent relationship, all kinds of bad stuff". The "bad stuff" of escorting Tyler talks about and the more pleasurable aspects of the work do not fit with the same genre.

### *Conrad*

Conrad has been working as an escort for more than a decade. At age 42, Conrad grew up during the height of the AIDS panic. Experiencing the death of friends influenced

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<sup>24</sup> *My Own Private Idaho* is a movie about street hustlers in Portland who scrape by working mostly with male clients. River Phoenix plays a narcoleptic street hustler in search of self-discovery.

his perspective concerning sex work and safe sex politics. A slogan of the times in activist circles was “Silence = Death”. This slogan was part of a campaign against staying in the closet concerning sexual status and HIV/AIDS status, insofar as staying silent, going it alone, often led to diminished access to the care necessary to prevent or manage the virus. Conrad therefore took a more ‘out’ orientation to his work compared to other escorts I interviewed. He was not ashamed of his work, and though he was not politically active today he did talk a lot about the safe sex guidance he offers clients. Still, Conrad kept a few secrets:

I don’t hide it, well I don’t really want my mother to know but I mean there’s a few people that every once in a while cross my mind because I do have my face on the Internet and it’s the same old thing. They have something to hide too and if they show it to a friend then anyone, like if I were to show that, a picture of somebody to a friend that would be a friend that wouldn’t give a shit. Most of my friends know, I don’t give too much information I just leave it out, but I might just say, ‘Got to go do a rub down’ and everybody just laughs, other people want to know the details.

Male-for-male internet escorts still have to manage public understandings of what they do to avoid stigma. However, like most life history narratives, there is a lot going on here. Conrad shifts back and forth temporally, different people come in and out of the picture. Keeping secrets is not simply a matter of watching who one tells stories to about what they do; as I discuss in Chapter Seven, it is also a matter of managing their ‘virtual body’. The specialty websites that escorts advertise on require pictures. Some of the websites ask escorts to include face pictures. Disclosure can compromise the anonymity of the escorts. Conrad has to manage his anonymity, striking a balance between being ‘out’ and ensuring his family and select others do not learn how he is funding the semesters he is spending in art school.

### *Leon*

Most male-for-male internet escorts explicitly position themselves in their story telling as different from hustlers and on-street workers, suggesting they do not have so-called

'troubles' like other sex workers. Yet some of the men I talked to did start out working on-street, and some continued to be street-involved for many years. Leon, for example, describes hustling in and being shuffled around Toronto during the 1990s. This specific narrative is about one stint with an escort agency:

You always knew you were going to be relatively safe, you were not just picking up someone off the street, and someone always knew you were leaving and maybe even the person you were leaving with. The one thing about the agency I worked for in Toronto, I got fired. I met a person who was really cool, really generous was lonely and wanted a companion. Outside of the business I stayed in contact. I lost my job because of that. But that person provided so much for a year or two. That is what happens to me. I go back into to the business, somebody wants me and they pay for it, they end up taking a liking to me, and they become not a sugar daddy but a 'I like this guy and I will help him out' kinda thing. I am very fortunate in that way. What I am doing at this point in my life most people are doing at 25. So I am living the life of a 25 year old. For the last 15 years. That is the draw back. It stunts your growth.

Leon still hustles and uses recreational drugs once in a while, but is trying not to. He reflects on his sex work and suggests it "stunts" his life chances. For him, sex work is tied to drugs, and so he tries to stay away from both.

### *Bruce*

Like Leon, Bruce does not paint a rosy picture of sex work. Though many escorts narrate their entry into escorting as being a choice they make when looking for work, some other escorts feel compelled into it, as Bruce from Toronto puts it:

The reason why I decided to do it was because I wanted some extra money. I can only work part time because in my early teens I suffered from depression and anxiety attacks so I used to work full time, I have a really low threshold for stress so I actually started to get really sick, I started to develop some serious gastro-intestinal problems. I was having really, really bad panic attacks and having really bad bouts of fatigue. So I saw my physician and was jumping from specialist to specialist and recommended that I only work part time. I actually had to go on Canada Pension disability so I've gotten myself really struggling financially. I remember I was talking to a friend and my friend actually made a casual joke and said, 'Well you know why don't you just do some escort work?'

Bruce took on escorting work because he was unable to do other work that required long shifts or extended periods of time away from his home. Escorting provided a form of work that paid well and could be completed in an hour or two. Even though he cannot escort full-time, Bruce's biography and his sex work have become interwoven in many ways:

I had grown up in foster homes and the last foster home that I had lived in my foster parents had died and I had just broken up with my last partner so I had this appointment to go to, just an erotic massage for this gentleman who was staying in a hotel, it was really hard because at that time of my life I was crying a lot. I was really depressed, there was a lot of stuff that was going on in my personal life and I was tempted to call this person and cancel the appointment but I went through with it anyway because I needed the money. And when I showed up the client could tell that I was upset about something and said, 'Oh if you want to talk about it we can talk about it'. So as I was giving him the massage, I was kind of crying and everything, it was hard for me to kind of hold it together and so forth. You know we had a really good time, the client and I, we just kind of after the massage we just sort of sat around talking and so forth and he was actually a nice guy and he was giving me advice...

In Chapter Four I argued that these men have more of a 'choice' to enter sex work than many other sex workers due to their social and economic position, although the narratives of Bruce and Leon suggest that still sometimes not much choice is involved. In addition to showing how the 'choice' to escort is complicated for some men, Bruce's narrative demonstrates how it is difficult to keep one's private life and work life separate. Work life and private life loop into one another, sometimes in the corporeal setting of the encounter between client and escort (Calhoun and Weaver, 2000; Davies and Feldman, 1999). This narrative also suggests how a passing pleasure can metamorphose into a touching encounter full of affection, in this case with the client supporting the escort. Male-for-male internet escorting has more to do with how diverse sexualities are amongst men who have sex with men than criminological or public health research agendas can account for.

In this section, I have been emphasizing stories that regard keeping secrets as well as managing information about one's escorting activities. The stories that escorts tell about their

work and their biography can sometimes be contradictory and contrapuntal. Narrative analysis does not need to locate a single underlying story that is a causal mechanism in people's life histories. Some escorts talk about what they consider to be the dark side of the industry, as Steve from Toronto does here: "you start to go down. It's very enticing with the money but then you start to realize how hard it is to stay there. You get kind of washed up". Keeping secrets for years and years can lead to a sense of isolation. At age 33, Steve left escorting once he received his PhD in psychology. But not all escorts dwell on the dark side. Eddy, age 29, suggests there is no dark side to the industry itself:

I feel like I'm 100% alone in this but that's what I want. I don't want a support network. I don't need that. I do not need an HR department because this is something, like, I just want to do it when I need it and I don't want to do it when I don't need it.

The biographies of escorts are shaped by their relations with clients. These multiple relations challenge the claim that sex workers maintain a strict barrier between their work and private lives (see Browne and Minichiello, 1995), even if (as Eddy's excerpt suggests) privacy is what they would prefer.

### **Playing Young, Getting Old, and Overcoming the 'Best by Date'**

Discussing biography in relation to sex necessitates reflection on age and aging. Heaphy (2007) contends that the issue of aging in communities of men who have sex with men remains understudied by sociologists. González (2007) likewise argues that sexuality is related more to age than scholars who focus on class and gender have accounted for. Talk about aging is talk about one's changing position in the life course. As I mentioned earlier, I am interested in what these men say about aging because talk about age is often talk about the body. Discussion of aging and male sexuality offers a rejoinder to queer theory's lack of consideration of age as an axis of social exclusion. As we age, sexuality becomes stratified;

we fall out of relations with younger people and people we used to share a sense of belonging with. This tendency results in what González (2007) refers to as “age-graded sexualities”. There are many age-related tropes in gay communities concerning men’s bodies (e.g. ‘chicken,’ ‘chicken hawk,’ ‘daddy’).<sup>25</sup> These ways of age-grading sexuality in turn come to shape life histories and figure in the stories people tell about themselves and their encounters with others. The work narratives of male-for-male internet escorts make clear that aging is important both for clients and escorts.

Clients, as escorts explain, are generally looking for something new and something young in an escort. There are only limited possibilities for older escorts to open up niche markets and remain in the trade for decades. Age is pivotal in relations between these men. Most escorts lie about their age on their website to attract more customers. As Frederico from Toronto says, “it is kind of unwritten rules, everybody shaves a couple of years out”. The narratives of male-for-male escorts evince that there is a great deal of inclusion and exclusion that goes on around age, as Tyler suggests:

I am 34 years old. Most clients think I am 24 or 26. They say I look that age. On my websites I put my date of birth as 1980, so I say I am 27 and that works for me. If they wanted younger they will go for a twink 19 or 20. That is fine. There are certain men who only want someone over 25. I say I am 27. And because of the way I look it works fabulously, because they see me and they say oh god you look good, how old did you say you were. I never tell them by the way I am actually 34 years old. It is about keeping the fantasy. If I did post my real age and told people I was 34 years old, I would not get as many calls. Because people still discriminate based on age. And the fantasy is that they want some young twenty something kind of guy. Even if you look good at 34, they will shoot for a lower age. I have never had someone tell me they thought I was lying about my age, even though I am. No one has ever said I am too old. I know I will not be able to keep that up forever, I think I look about 10 years younger, as long as I am able to look that way without any help, I will do it...

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<sup>25</sup> ‘Chickens’ refer to younger, clean-cut men, similar to ‘twinks’ (young, without body hair, slender, permissive and androgynous). ‘Chickenhawks’ refer to older gay men cruising for younger, boyish-looking sex partners.

Aging is important in the lives of men who have sex with men, and especially for escorts who feel pressure to provide a youthful appearance and virility during interactions with clients. This bind is similar to the agonized tale Oscar Wilde weaves in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The book offers an account of the lengths to which people will extend for beauty and adoration. As one character in the novel says to another, “you only have a few years in which to live really, perfectly, and fully”. Many escorts and clients abide by this impossible vision of the young, tender body in their communication concerning the encounter. But as escorts move on in the life course, they must position themselves differently as it regards sexuality and their web persona. Claude is an escort who has worked in Toronto and Montréal. He describes how aging influences his sexuality as well as his escorting work:

I’m not really a boy anymore. I kind of was when I started, I was only 25. Now I’m almost 30 and I’ve, you know I have a man’s body and there’s been a part of me that has actually had some trouble embracing that. I think partially because when I first started sex trade work my view was that all sex trade workers were young. All sex trade workers were hairless, they were sort of twinkie, which I sort of never was although when I first started working, you know I always think I shaved my face really close, sometimes I would shave twice a day. I was always really hairless for my clients. I shaved my chest. And I was trying to kind of present this vision of, it wasn’t even a matter necessarily of being masculine or un-masculine but a version of boyishness or youth. And as I aged a little bit, I have a little bit of grey hair coming in. I don’t shave my chest at all anymore. I don’t shave my face every day. And I actually found that since I’ve become a bit more masculine looking, first of all my existing clients were really into it. They really like it, it turns them on. And I find that new clients find me more attractive because I look like a man not a boy.

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the facts of our body change as we age. Bodies become incapable of certain feats that once provided pleasure. The bodies of escorts provide resources they can draw on in advertising to clients and pleasing them during their encounters. Another way of saying this is that the body is an “open materiality” (Grosz, 1994:191) insofar as it is a set of potentialities to be worked on and through. There is a

market for older, more mature escorts, but escorts must remarket themselves at various points in the life course and make different uses of the facts of their bodies to be accepted.

Certainly there is a market for older escorts, but it is a niche market. Some men will always want other men who are older than themselves. Aging means the clientele one caters to must change. In the words of Bob from Ottawa:

...there's quite a few I get who said they don't want a kid, they want someone they know who's going to show up on time, who isn't going to bang on my door at three in the morning or call me to borrow money, you know that sort of thing. And so I have gotten a lot like that, if I want a kid, I'll hire a kid you know...they don't want the games. They don't want the chat and all the bullshit, you know some of them might want drinks all night just to have them fuck off on them, that sort of thing so like they view it as they would rather pay the same amount of money and get a guarantee.

The aging body provides a different set of resources for escorts to draw upon in marketing themselves. Aging allows an escort to position himself as responsible and trustworthy. These and other profile differences such as pictures and client reviews inevitably create a basis for comparison with escorts who are much younger. Oscar is 56 years old, and started escorting when he was 48 because he could not secure work as a stage actor in London England. He spends many hours a day in the gym pumping up his aging body. He talks about how his escorting encounters are mediated by age:

We all are, at the moment, with the credit crunch, people are dropping to lower rates, so far I have not brought mine down, and I am trying not to, because I want to remain at the top end of the market and be attracting wealthier clients. At the lower end of the market, there are lots of kids out there who will do anything for anything. And these younger kids probably can because they can do it for next to nothing because they can come four or five times a day, but I cannot do that because I am too old for that. One a day. Sometimes I can do three in a day still, but I am quite happy if I get one good client and spend time with them (Oscar, London).

Oscar positions himself against younger escorts who are keen to do anything for any amount of money. Oscar has created a bit of a niche market because, as he says, "there are not many older guys doing it and not many guys with my kind of body". The focus on his body

indicates that a sense of virility is still at the centre of his sexual persona, yet he admits that the facts of his body have changed and he can only be sexually active once a day. Being an older escort influences the labour process in other ways as well. For instance, part of being an older escort is the ability to better screen clients and only take on those clients one is interested in having an encounter with:

With age, I am in a much better position to control who I see and what I do. If I am not comfortable on the phone with someone I will not agree to see them. I get a lot more respect from clients, the guys who come to see me, the sex is sex, but they are looking for something more, and I have to say that in the main I have been treated with absolute respect, I have never had a problem, I have met some really nice people. There has not been a bad experience (Oscar, London).

Oscar's buff body mixed with the charm of his gentleman persona is unique in escorting markets, which allows him to capitalize on a particular age-graded sexuality. Harvey from Montréal likewise adds that clients "trust me because of my experience," which only comes with age. Not all escorts can transition into a niche market, and so as escorts get older or sense they have reached an age limit some leave the industry in search of other work.

Aging does not usher in an end to escorting, but it does present the escort with several challenges that require new attention to the work they do on their own bodies, their advertisements and their potential clientele. As Dorais (2005:35) puts it, mobility in sex work "tends to be downward with age". It is difficult to stay in escorting past a certain age, though some escorts do successfully transition into a 'daddy' role, which is easier in leather communities and bondage communities where aging is looked upon less negatively. Escorting while aging involves remarketing one's self as a sexual subject. As evidence of how age-graded sexualities (González, 2007; Jones and Pugh, 2005) shape the way that escorts fashion a sense of self, older escorts position against younger men in their talk about aging. For instance, in our conversation Sam (44 years old) from Ottawa persistently

reminded me that he did not consider himself an 'escort' because of the association of all sex work with poverty. Sam also told many stories about how being an older man made him a more responsible worker, a professional, such that he would not engage in the activities that younger escorts often did:

I am no longer in my twenties, you can see that. Maybe that has something to do with why I do not like to call myself an escort. Things like that may not be so appealing for people my age, and I am offering more of a service than just sex, and I found out maybe I am making more money than the younger guys, some people say you are too expensive, some say it is fair, some say it is expensive. Some say, what do I get for \$60? I say you get a great massage, including your crotch and everything, a good orgasm at the end. He said 'is that all?' He said I go to a guy and I get a blow job for \$50. I told him to go back to that person. That is a good deal. Stick to it! Another guy told me once that it is good that I am a bit older because I know what I want, know what I am doing and they can trust me more than those younger guys. People realize that what I do is different from what those younger guys do. I am a person who is not depending on this job to live.

In this narrative, Sam is composing a sense of self and differentiating himself from younger escorts. Aging men must successfully reposition in the sex industry, yet they also have fewer opportunities for other forms of so-called legitimate work, especially other forms of work that pay as well as escorting. They need to align themselves with the acceptable age-graded sexualities that can work as an escorting persona. In the words of Bob from Ottawa:

I'd like to get out of it but where else am I making 100 –150 bucks an hour. It's just so hard to go back to work for even 15 or 20 bucks an hour, or even salaries just suck. It's really hard to go from making that kind of money you know tax free to working full eight-hour days. I can pass for 25-26 most of the time but in a few years I'm not going to be able to.

Moving on through the life course can generate age-related worries for the escort, especially as it regards the ability to achieve economic security. Some of these men worry about aging itself, but this concern is tied to worries about having an income. Ricky in Toronto found:

You basically have to stop it at a certain point because, I know the market, guys generally want younger guys. It's a very small niche market that want someone openly say 40 and up. And I'm not trying to be vain or arrogant, I, I got, like I got ID-

ed on Pride Day and I know I can't pass for that, that's really pushing it. I probably wouldn't try to do this work if I actually thought I looked almost 40. I probably wouldn't even bother but I know I can get away with at least 5 years younger. So yeah, there's definitely a cut off point for it. There's a 'best by date'.

Numerous authors commenting on aging and male sexuality (see Potts et al., 2006; Katz and Marshall, 2003) have argued that there are new pressures on men in the 'Viagra Era' to remain virile throughout the life course. Viagra and other treatments aim to produce 'posthuman' bodies that consume and are sexually active into old age, creating sexual senior citizens. There are also broad pressures and stereotypes concerning older men in gay communities (Drummond, 2005). Older men come across as less touchable.

As indicated in Chapter Five, men who have sex with men do not all use the same language to refer to themselves and their sexuality. This volatility of the 'gay' signifier (Manalansan, 1995) intersects with how men of different ages make sense of sex as well. 'Queer,' as a word, was re-appropriated by the New York City Aids Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) in 1990. But the 'queer' label might fail to account for the histories of older gay men, since their strategies of passing were based on assimilation to heterosexual norms of masculinity. Some of these stereotypes are explicitly callous towards older gay men. Donald in New York, who just turned 50 at the time of our interview, said:

I think there's this huge stereotype that people over 40 are trolls... there's this certain attitude with you know once you hit 35 or 40 you're just, you're not interesting, you're just put out to pasture and that's it. But that there's definitely a sense among older men themselves of being with somebody that has some experience, they have something to relate to, some common experience that they share and some life that they can reflect on together. Especially in terms of S&M, you want somebody that at least looks like they have the experience and can be trusted and that they know what they are doing and part of the whole daddy image depends on that. There's one thing I noticed about older clients too that they, like they're not so focused on ejaculation, if it happens it's great but it doesn't have to and that sometimes no matter how much they wanted to it just doesn't and they don't hold you responsible for that whereas sometimes a younger client might say 'it's your fault I didn't come'. You weren't good enough. Some you know older guys, Mother Nature just you know that's the

way it is sometimes. But there's a lot more realism I think on the part of older men and they appreciate somebody that they can share that with...it's a certain maturity that comes with experience.

This narrative ties back to what Crossley (2007) calls the facts of the body. As Donald points out, the relation between client and escort can be de-sexualized insofar as it focuses on touching that is not genital-centric. Older men are said to be more comfortable with what their bodies cannot do. Marshall and Katz (2002:44) argue “relatively little attention has been paid to male bodies *qua* male bodies” and the functionality of the penis has always been defined by its ability to penetrate. “Masculinity remains anchored in the erect penis across the lifecourse” (pg. 63). However, heterosexual touching and focus on vaginal intercourse reflects a dominant sexual script that is penis-centric. The touching encounters of older men who have sex with men do not necessarily centre on the erect penis. Masculinity is often associated with being hard, strong, competitive and in control (Calasanti and King, 2005), but the fallible penis is a fact of the body that can lead to de-sexualized touching amongst older men. The penis loses its functionality, it fails (Stephens, 2007), and as a result the aging body can be de-sexualized. While the erect penis is valorized by many men, the aging gay community is more likely to recognize the limits of the body and what the escort and the client can do (also see Heaphy, 2007).

Aging is a prominent axis through which men who have sex with men become marginal. For Jones and Pugh (2005:258), “the emphasis in gay spaces has always been and continues to be on youth, and therefore older gay men are excluded from a world in which being old equates to being unattractive and being attractive is a precondition for entry”. Yet there can also be solidarity between aging men who recognize the limits of their bodies and find other dimensions of their selves to share with each other. There are older personas

available in gay communities – the ‘daddy’ – but not all escorts can provide these services and so they slowly leave the industry, hanging on to repeat clients until the clients let go.

## **Conclusion**

My overall purpose in this text is to draw from the sexual stories escorts tell about their encounters with clients to undo conventionally held ideas concerning the sex and the work of sex work. A fête of individual narratives is not likely to compel social scientists (Rustin, 2000), so instead of simply telling men’s stories I have argued that biography and escorting are interwoven in queer ways. The sex of escorts’ work is partly the sex of their life. Biography cannot be separated from sex work, nor can the work be annulled from biography. There is something unique about logic of the lure between men – sex and work do not have to be held apart because there is often no ‘private’ sex life to go home to. Encounters with clients become part of the life histories of these men.

Fox (2007) argues that younger men who have sex with men tend to neglect their aging counterparts. I likewise argue that men who have sex with men hold varying understandings of sexuality depending on their age and biography. Age can be an axis of exclusion in relations between men who have sex with men. Some of the above narratives suggest that age-based stereotypes operate amongst men who have sex with men, and that these stereotypes influence the ability of male-for-male internet escorts to continue doing this work as the facts of their bodies change. Other escort narratives suggest that older men who have sex with men are more comfortable with touching encounters not completely organized around an erect penis. By demonstrating how older escorts are entrepreneurial in finding clientele despite the breakdowns of their bodies, I have shown how aging does not necessarily lead to a decline in social position for older men who have sex with men (also see

Tulle, 2008). This particular sample of male internet escorts is slightly older than comparative samples (see Minichiello et al., 2008), which allows me to offer insight into how age-graded sexualities influence the work and sex lives of these men.

Beyond emphasizing how aging, sexuality and the body intersect for older male escorts, this chapter points to the limits of knowing about touching encounters through interview and narrative research. As Doucet (2006:63) puts it, “certain projects and certain sites of research do not lend themselves to knowing subjects but rather to *knowing only their narratives*”. Narrative is not an easy route to knowing selves or corporeality. Narrative only allows access to a storied version of the touching encounter. Sexual stories deal with encounters in a narrativized form. I have tried to foreground the life history narratives of these men while being reflexive about my role in positioning their narratives in this larger story. Interpretive decisions made by the researcher in taking the talk of respondents and mediating it through their frames of interpretation focalize the story that ends up being told.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN – ‘I KNOW WHAT IT IS TO REALLY HAVE TO WORK’: LABOUR PROCESS, SEXUALIZATION AND WHAT MALE-FOR-MALE INTERNET ESCORTS SAY ABOUT WHAT THEY DO**

I know what it is to have to really work...this is work too, I have to find clients, but it is easy work. I have done work, I have been to University, I have tried many things, I know this is easy. What you get from this and what you get from a day job, there is a big gap (Chris, Montréal).

### **Introduction**

Instead of thinking of the escort-client relation as deviant behaviour, or as a pure economic exchange, in this text I argue that escorting can be conceptualized as a corporeal interaction, a site for conversations of gesture and confessions of the self. To better understand the work of sex work, this chapter examines the labour process of male-for-male internet escorting. Escorting as self-employment has been shaped in part by the availability of computer and internet technologies (Phua and Caras, 2008; Pruitt, 2005), which has fused commercial sex with entrepreneurial e-business. Despite claims that work is less salient today as a factor in social life (Beck, 2000; Bauman, 1998a), and questions about the relevance of labour process theory (Lash and Urry, 1987; Storey, 1985), I build on the contributions of other sex work scholars (see Bruckert and Parent, 2006; Jeffrey and MacDonald, 2006) to argue that analysis of labour process can help sociologists make sense of work conditions, work tasks and sex worker relations with clients.

The strength of labour process theory (LPT) is its materialist theorization of workplace antagonism, deskilling, and worker subordination (Smith, 2006; Tinker, 2002). LPT originally dwelled on structural issues of control (see Braverman, 1974), while recent accounts have focused on a broader range of issues such as emotional labour (Theodosius, 2008; Bolton and Boyd, 2003). Although labour process patterns are similar across what Thompson (2003) refers to as “disconnected capitalism,” my analysis starts from the

assumption that labour processes are “specific to particular work settings” (Wardell, 1999:9). Arguing that LPT must be extended to consider the work of self-employed entrepreneurs, my analysis explores the individuated labour process of one form of non-standard work, where, instead of a typical employer-employee relationship in an organization, the exchange of labour power for pay is both constrained and enabled by internet use (also see Bruckert and Parent, 2006). Below I demonstrate how the clients of escorts post reviews online and rate the sexual encounter, which determines where the escort’s profile will be positioned in the hierarchy of commercial sex profiles and whether the escort can locate future clients. In addition to exploring how the internet makes possible new sex work arrangements, I supplement LPT by conceptualizing how central the sexualization of men’s bodies has become in some non-standard work. The commercial encounter of male-for-male escorting involves touching between men who are often strangers. Sexualization refers to a process by which the male figure is approached as a sex object and positioned as the focal point of a potential encounter (Cover, 2004b). I contend that the sexualities of male escorts are, in part, compelled through an entrepreneurial, individuated labour process, which raises interesting questions about “aesthetic labour” and the management of appearances for purposes of competitive advantage (Warhurst and Nickson, 2008) in commercial sex relations.

Beyond arguing that LPT must be supplemented through accounting for the sexualization of men’s bodies in non-standard work, this chapter considers how far the idea of sex work can be extended given the diversity of labour processes in the commercial sex industry across its various sectors. The idea of sex work signifies an effort to redefine people involved in commercial sex as workers who should be allowed the protections of any other workers (Alexander, 1998). Yet the ambivalence of many male-for-male internet escorts

about the idea of sex work suggests that sex worker activism develops unevenly from different sex industry sectors, which presents a challenge to sex work organizers in generating solidarity amongst people who sell sexual services.

This chapter has three sections. I begin by engaging with debates regarding labour process. I argue that, in order to understand some forms of non-standard work, LPT must account for the work of self-employed entrepreneurs as well as the sexualization of men's bodies. Second, I analyze the narratives of male-for-male internet escorts. I discuss elements of labour process such as entering the trade, work conditions, work tasks, advertising, and pricing. There is debate about how to research labour processes, and whether drawing from worker experiences is useful (Smith and Thompson, 1999; Willmott, 1997; Thompson, 1990). Below I focus on escort narratives as a way of understanding how their work is organized. Narratives provide knowledge of the way workers complete work tasks and relate to clients (see Boudens, 2005; Terkel, 1972). One paradox of what male escorts say about what they do is that some of the men reject the idea of sex worker solidarity whilst using labour vocabulary to frame their narratives. Thus, in conclusion, I argue that male-for-male internet escorts have diverse understandings of sex work, but few locate themselves within the sex work paradigm, which raises questions about sex work organizing and solidarity.

### **Labour Process and Male-for-Male Internet Escorting**

I have had regular jobs. I plan to again. But for now it is nice not having a retail store manager telling me what to do. I do not have to deal with crap. I was a call centre phone operator, a grocery store clerk. Dealing with clerks, 20 customers, learning about the whole organization and the whole goddamn store. My work is way different. I am awkward around some straight people, but with gay men I am in my element. I can be the life of the party in gay spaces. In this job, I work with gay men or closeted gay men, in their homes or hotel rooms, I know how to talk to them, I know how to please them. One at a time in a private space. This suits my skills and talents better than a straight desk job (Frank, Toronto).

Frank's narrative indicates that male-for-male internet escorts make sense of their work in relation to other jobs they have had as well as other jobs they hope to have in the future. Jeffrey and MacDonald (2006) note that some sex workers select commercial sex over the labour process of service-sector work, and Frank's narrative certainly speaks to how different the work of escorting is to working in a retail store or a grocery store or a call centre. How can this difference in labour process be theorized? Below I explore the work of male-for-male internet escorting using labour process theory (LPT).

Capitalist labour process involves the design, control and management of labour for the purpose of extracting surplus value. Labour process theory (LPT) focuses on how employers and managers control the direction and tasks of labour. Conceptualizations of the elementary forms of labour process are tied to the work of Karl Marx. Marx (1976:174) argues "the elementary factors of the labour-process are 1. the personal activity of man, i.e., work itself, 2. the subject of that work, and 3. its instruments". Marx's definition has sociological resonance, showing how capitalist labour process becomes the primary means by which people are brought into social relations. Modifying Marx's approach, below I discuss work conditions and tasks, as well as relations with clients as the elementary forms of labour process in non-standard work such as sex work.

Beyond claims about control and surplus value, LPT has hosted debates concerning subjectivity, identity and gender (Doherty, 2009; Thompson and Newsome, 2004; West, 1990; Knights, 1990). Reevaluations of the labour process debate emerged in response to Braverman's (1974) argument that LPT's focus should be objective processes of managerial control rather than work as felt on the shop floor. In response to Braverman, Burawoy (1979) started a reflexive turn in LPT by arguing that many analyses of labour process are overly

structuralist. Burawoy demonstrates how worker agency sometimes aligns with consent to labour processes. Thompson and Smith (2009) likewise argue that accounts of labour process germane to 'industrial sociology' are limited in light of the impact of new technologies on work, the shift to a service economy and mobilization of emotional labour.

One criticism of LPT is that it does not help develop a broader sociology of work (Strangleman, 2007). LPT seems to be "dictated by what appears to be an iron law of surplus extraction" (Streek, 1987:284), and for this reason Storey (1985) argues LPT is essentializing. Forms of work "not felt to be of strategic political relevance" (Watson, 2003:46) have been excluded from the purview of LPT. Perhaps there are ways to extend LPT while remaining in dialogue with its core theory? In this regard, Thompson (1989: 247) suggests that not all work is labour, insofar as owner extraction of surplus value is not always involved, and there can be no "fixed orthodoxy" (pg. 213) of LPT post-Braverman. Thompson and McHugh (2002:370) add "it remains the case that not all organizational processes or forms of work activity can be understood solely through a theory whose categories are geared to explaining capitalist production".

What kind of work is sex work? Gall (2006) argues most sex work is capitalist labour, since in businesses like escort agencies and erotic dance clubs an owner benefits from the labour of others. LPT could be applied to the work of escorts who work for an agency, or the work of erotic dancers in a club, since there is extraction of surplus value from sexualized labour. With internet escorting, however, there is no organization oriented toward controlling the work, there is no owner who benefits from extraction of surplus value. Therefore, a case needs to be made to apply LPT to the work of self-employed entrepreneurs.

The chief reason why LPT should focus on the entrepreneurial self-employed is that these workers “further the cause of post-industrial capital through their own volition” (Jones and Spicer, 2005:224). Escorting involves self-valorization, where there is a generation of capital that exceeds the effort and capital sunk into the aesthetic labour and body work. Though internet escorts do not work in organizations, flows of capital crosscut their work. ‘Work’ is conventionally conceived to be full-time and based on manufacturing (Gregson et al., 1999), yet this kind of work is increasingly rare. There exist many ways of categorizing new non-standard work, including ‘non-conventional’ and ‘atypical’. Male-for-male internet escorting is non-standard work. Escorts are not represented by agencies and are largely unaware of each other as ‘competitors,’ meaning that internet escorting operates with an individuated labour process and is similar to work described as ‘self-employment’ and ‘dependent self-employment’ (Muehlberger, 2007). Self-employment refers to work where the worker makes decisions autonomously, but has no office support. Dependent self-employment signals work that ties the worker to an agency or a clientele, where the cost of switching from the client pool would be a burden. Some escorts use this labour vocabulary in describing what they do:

You’re self-employed, and you’re also not self-employed...you’re dependent on whether or not someone is interested in you, whether or not they want to see you again, whether or not they like your pictures online, whether or not they liked what you had to say in an email (Claude, Montréal).

Despite being clandestine, internet escorting occurs within broader chains of commerce that impact how the work is organized (West and Austrin, 2002). The work of entrepreneurs and the self-employed, especially work tasks and their exchanging of labour power for pay, can be explored through LPT. Although escorting does not happen in a factory or organization where ‘workers’ are constituted en masse and surveyed by a manager, ‘entrepreneurs’ are

motivated by a corporate ethos and seek to accumulate capital on their own (Fenwick, 2002). Brazeal and Herbert (1999) argue the sociological study of entrepreneurs is underdeveloped, and I argue that LPT can provide analytical guidance to broaden the study of entrepreneurs.

LPT can be extended by focusing on non-standard forms of work that exist outside the “restrictive logic of wage-effort bargaining” (O’Doherty and Willmott, 2009:946). Part of reorienting the focus of LPT involves analyzing how control in the labour process comes not from ‘above’ but ‘below’ through freelance work enabled by new communication technologies, and how surplus value in the labour process is collected not from ‘above’ but ‘below’ by the entrepreneurial self-employed. LPT need not focus only on work where employers place structures of control over labour, but can analyze forms of work based on self-management. This is not an attempt to theorize the ‘missing subject’ of LPT, but instead an effort to examine how the logic of accumulation and competition germane to labour process is relocated outside of work organizations and in more entrepreneurial settings. To complement LPT’s core theory, I examine how the logic of competition germane to labour process is relocated outside of work organizations in entrepreneurial settings. Internet escorting is work that LPT should be concerned with; escorting is an activity that breaks from capitalist extraction of surplus value only to revalorize the same process, wherein aesthetic labour is still positioned as a commodity in the circulation of capital-money-capital.

Distinctive about male-for-male internet escorting is that sexualization of the male body is at the centre of the labour process, troubling conventional understandings of masculinity and work. ‘Men’s work’ has been associated with manual labour. Disciplined to create a tight fit between the nuclear family and industry, working men’s bodies are thought of as the embodiment of a working class habitus, and are assumed to be heterosexual (Sears,

1999). Men's work has been tied to family through the notion of 'breadwinning,' depicted as a man bringing home money to pay for family expenses (Warren, 2007). Yet heterosexual, breadwinning masculinity is less and less associated with non-standard work. As a kind of non-standard work, male-for-male escorting involves aesthetic labour (Warhurst and Nickson, 2007), where the escort is pressed to work on the appearance of their body for pay. Male-for-male escorting is also a form of body work (Wolkowitz, 2006) that involves men erotically touching the bodies of other men. The link between heterosexual masculinity and work is eroded, because breadwinning masculinity is replaced by the fluidity of queer sexuality, sexualizing the escort body as a matter of labour process. I draw from Warhurst and Nickson's (2009) account of aesthetic labour and management of appearances to discuss the work of sexual entrepreneurs. However, while Warhurst and Nickson use the concept of aesthetic labour to indicate how organizations hire employees with particular appearances, I focus on the work of self-employed internet escorts, extending LPT into a realm of work that is not predicated on surplus value extraction but is integrated with flows of capital, based on exchange of labour power for pay, and thus subject to similar time and financial pressures as faced by labourers in work organizations.

What makes male-for-male internet escorting a remarkable case for sociologists is that the male body is at the centre of the relation between escort and client. LPT has begun to account for emotions (Theodosius, 2008; Bolton and Boyd, 2003), and the sexualization of women's bodies (Pringle, 1989). Yet the sexualization of men's bodies has not been a primary concern. Considerations of men doing 'women's work' (Sayce et al., 2007; Simpson, 2004; Lupton, 2000) or analysis of the work experiences of gay men (Ward, 2008) are not the same as examining the sexualization of men's bodies as a feature of labour process.

Contemporary societies are marked by a shift towards exploratory sexuality, a loosening of kinship bonds typical of heterosexual relations that Bauman (2003) refers to as “liquid love”. This unyoking of sex from family and placement in the marketplace leads to malleable identities and pervasive individualization (Giddens, 1992). Sexualization of men’s bodies as an element of labour process results, in part, from the rise of recreational sex, and the creation of niche gay/lesbian commodity markets. Uses of sex today serve many purposes, including the exchange of labour power by men.

### **What Male-for-Male Internet Escorts Say About What They Do** *Entering the Trade*

The stories these men shared about their entry into escorting challenge stereotypes commonly invoked regarding sex workers. Luckenbill (1985) argues that entrance into male sex work occurs as a solution to desperate living or as an exciting adventure. The stories of these men suggest that entrance into escorting hinges on the same requisite of entrance into other work: the need to exchange one’s labour power under capitalism. For instance, before becoming an internet escort in Canada, Sam from Ottawa had been advertising his abilities as a manual labourer in a local newspaper somewhere in the Caribbean. He was receiving inquiries from potential clients about whether he conducted erotic massage:

At first I was a bit scared. You know how people think about this kind of job. So, at the beginning I said no. But it kept coming with every ad. There would be a call now and then, because I was putting my phone number in the ad. I was not ashamed to be looking for work.

He found that erotic massage (and then escorting) did not subject him to external rules or employer surveillance. Sam felt entering the trade was a decision to secure the best income that existed for him at the time: “People were offering me money to do the work for them. I came in time to find myself in a position where I am making rules” (Sam, Ottawa). Unlike

Sam, some escorts start out in escorting agencies. Sex workers in Luckenbill's (1985) study either left the escort agency they worked at because that they felt under control, or were fired because they did not follow the rules. A few of the escorts I spoke with quit agencies due to pressure from the employer:

My first client in Ottawa was through an agency. There was added security. The agency knew the guy and his place and contact number if anything happened there would be a safe out. But the guy running the agency was an asshole. He made me sick to my stomach. I did not stay there for long because I felt degraded...I felt like I was a number. They were not respecting my existing work schedule (Tyler, Ottawa).

Upon entry into internet escorting, these men found that the lack of rules set from above was a welcome change compared to other work and even other forms of sex work.<sup>26</sup>

Consistent with claims about conventional working lives being replaced by erratic post-industrial job changes (Bauman, 1998a), some men entered escorting after losing other jobs. Frederico moved to Ontario from Mexico three years before I interviewed him. He had been working in the automotive sector near Toronto. When the manufacturing plant where he worked closed, he found himself without income, with credentials valourized only by an ailing industry. Frederico had always been interested in sex with men, but had never considered commercial sex relations prior to being laid off. "These times are difficult for manufacturing," he says. Frederico continues to look for other work while living off of escorting during this transition.<sup>27</sup> Other men sought a second job, meaning that escorting is, for some, temporary work. Some men start escorting to supplement their income:

I started this when I was 46. My regular job, I make \$80,000 a year, and my first year of escorting I made in excess of \$10,000...I didn't rely on that as my primary but it was a good supplement, good part time work that didn't require as many tedious hours as a part time job at a bookstore (Donald, New York).

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<sup>26</sup> See Smith and colleagues (2008) for an argument that some escort agencies with bosses who are former workers can create different working conditions.

<sup>27</sup> Mallon (2001) argues that labour scholars as well as sociologists of sexuality have largely ignored the experiences of working class gay men, especially gay men in the manufacturing industry.

While some men become involved in escorting when they are older and have a steady income, other men started out in the more perilous business of on-street propositioning:

When I was 18 was probably the first time on the street, I was propositioning. Then it became a little more structured. The difference would be post-internet, it created more professionalism with people who have websites. They go to the gym. They are into fitness. They do porn. I don't do any of that. Their website is slick. They charge a lot of money and are more like a companion. I fall in the middle. I'm not a pro but I'm not a scam artist. I do it for extra money. It doesn't pay my rent (Conrad, Toronto).

The men I spoke with work other jobs, have internet access, and accept clients depending on income variation, resonating with what Bernstein (2007b) refers to as “middle class sex work”. Commercial sex is now accepted as a way to make money due to a shift from “a relational to a recreational model of sexual intimacy” (pg. 141), which creates new possibilities for the sexualization of men's bodies. The men I interviewed are seeking out the best earnings to hours-worked ratio. As Frank from Toronto put it:

It's an efficient way to make money. Rather than working four hours and coming home with 45 dollars like at my day job, plus my commute, I can work for about an hour and fifteen minutes, come home and I've got 200 bucks.

What makes escorting so 'efficient,' in Frank's words is, in part, the internet. The hardware and software required to communicate with clients are the 'instruments' of the labour process for self-employed sexual entrepreneurs. As I discuss below, the profiles created by escorts are searchable based on city location and aesthetic features of the escort, meaning that clients sort escorts based on categories of sexuality and body type. Escorts must accentuate certain parts of their bodies using pictures to lever a competitive advantage.

#### *Work Tasks and Conditions: Escorts as Sexual Entrepreneurs*

Male-for-male internet escorting is not tied to any formal organization, but it is organized according to the anonymous, just-in-time relations enabled by the internet.

Thompson and Smith (2009) argue that communication technologies like the internet make possible work that is no longer tied to a particular locale. Male-for-male internet escorting is part of the circuit of global capital enabled by such technologies. Escort clients are often traveling members of the transnational capitalist class, such as chief executives, looking for a one-night mate in each new city. These issues concerning sexual cities are discussed briefly in Appendix A.

Establishing a connection with a client requires hours in front of a computer by the escort creating online advertisements or finding clients in online chat rooms (Campbell, 2007). Whether escorts use specialty sites or chat rooms, the escort controls when work happens: “When I am not available, I am not available. I am on a couple of gay sites. When I am online, I am available. Guests who come a second time usually have my number” (Sam, Ottawa). While a “new breed of e-pimps” (Kilvington et al., 2001:90) may have emerged in other online sectors of commercial sex, this is not the case with male-for-male internet escorting. Escorts select clients based on email correspondence. Screening occurs through the process of reading correspondence and looking for cues to ensure the other person is a serious client, not a police officer or a time waster: “I screen based on gut feeling. When I talk to someone on the phone, or by email, if the language and the words do not sound right, they are screened right away” (Tyler, Ottawa). Working at a computer, dealing with emails, is a constant task amongst the escorts I spoke with. The task of escorting is foremost this clerical activity of booking clients.

Weiss and Riesman (1961:79) wrote that “in a society where most men work, the job furnishes a metronome-like capacity to keep in order one’s routine of waking and sleeping, time on and time off, life on and life off the job”. With male-for-male internet escorting, the

timing of the work is undisciplined. Escorting does not follow the triangle of time, discipline and work that marks industrial capitalism. Although some of their narratives suggest that escorts take clients when they want for as long as they want, these men are 'on call' at the whim of clients. There are surges of clientele, for example, during the week of Gay Pride celebrations. There are also ups and downs in terms of the number of clients:

I'll have a day or two where my phone is ringing off the hook and I'm seeing four or five clients in a day, then I don't get a call for a week...either everybody wants to get laid or nobody wants to get laid...I always had jobs where I worked specific days of the week before. I thought, I'll book one or two clients today, one or two clients tomorrow, one or two clients the next day you know have a couple of days off. It doesn't work like that (Claude, Montréal).

The escort labour process compels sexual conduct, insofar as escorts provide the kind of sexual event clients want on demand. The escort is the owner of his sexualized body and labour power, until he has bargained for its sale to the client. Not only is the work unsteady, but the rapport the escort attempts to create with the client does not always lead to that client becoming a repeat client. Repeat clients are what allow escorts to build up a clientele and start escorting full time. This uncertainty with clientele is similar to what an independent contractor faces.

Further signaling an individuated labour process, escorts tend not to know one another. One escort from Ottawa, the smallest city in my sample at one million people, mentioned that he knows a couple escorts and they occasionally meet to discuss clients: "It's a small community here and so we compare notes and every once in a while. If a client is an asshole it gets out" (Bob, Ottawa). In Ottawa, the small number of escorts and the limited clientele makes for a competitive market: "summer gets rough, all the kids come in and it can get competitive. When I started there were two in a chat room, now there's 20" (Bob,

Ottawa). Frank, in Toronto, says he is unaware of other escorts besides two he has had group encounters with:

Met one guy. I did a three way with him and a client. I spoke with him in the shower afterwards, but we have not spoken since. I did a three way with another client but we did not speak after, we might have swapped numbers in case he was looking for another three way.

However, most male-for-male internet escorts tend not to know one another unless they are 'co-workers' who facilitate group encounters to make more money. Only one escort I spoke with knew several other escorts. He would refer clients to other escorts by email or phone:

I got business cards. Whenever I go to a new city, Las Vegas, San Antonio, that is how I get other guys to work for me, I try to get Latin guys or dark haired guys, a dark complexion and tight body like mine, I have an ad with more than one city on it, so with those cities if someone calls but I am not there I can give it to my friends. Get a kickback. I have not seen a lot of guys in the last two years cause I do more referrals (Byron, Houston).

This narrative substantiates Phoenix's (1999) claim that some sex workers embrace the ideal of market entrepreneurship, and also speaks to how sexualities are compelled by the labour process insofar as sexualized features of the male body are selected out and made the basis of the exchange.

Internet escorts are not represented by agencies, which means they must be entrepreneurial to make money. An entrepreneur assumes the risk of an initiative to make profit. With male-for-male internet escorts, the risk is that they will not locate clientele who are interested in their particular sexualized bodily features. I refer to this activity as sexual entrepreneurialism. Lane (2000) discusses "sexual entrepreneurs" such as pornographic filmmakers who create images that become popularized with consumers. I argue that escorts as sexual entrepreneurs meet a demand for specific kinds of touching. Escorts offer sexual services based on the sexual preferences of clients, the kinds of fetishes clients are after. A

key aspect of sexuality when it comes to internet escorting, then, is signaling one's sexual persona, invoking the idea of what activities one will partake in, and fashioning one's body to be fit for that activity. The working sexuality of the escort is compelled by client demands. Sexual entrepreneurialism also requires that escorts have pictures that accentuate features of their bodies to post online:

I model so sometimes I can use some of my modeling pics... it's good to get new pictures often at least every month when you're escorting because people get tired of you... your new pictures look better, they'll be like, 'Oh he's looking really good'. And they'll probably call you again (Mike, New York).

...

It is difficult to pitch it right because you can give people the wrong impression just by putting a certain picture or piece of text up. A lot of my stuff I have leather on but if I use a leather picture for my main image the only people I will get are the leather people and the people who are put off by leather would be too frightened to get in touch with me (Oscar, London).

Since pictures are crucial for attracting clients, Garry from Toronto says he will "play with pictures. I've learned how to photoshop. It's tedious and a bit soul destroying to alter your own pictures, but I'm good at it". Aligning with a "cyber-type" (Nakamura, 2002), a particular display of the online self, is an effective way of signaling what niche sexual market the escort caters to.

These narratives about self-appearance suggest that a key aspect of escorting is aesthetic labour. Warhurst and Nickson (2007) define aesthetic labour as the positioning of workers in the labour process based on bodily appearance. However, escorts engage in aesthetic labour not for the competitive advantage of an employer, but to lever competitive advantage as sexual entrepreneurs. Aesthetic labour requires plucking, trimming, waxing, and shaving. Escorts are generally comfortable with a repertoire of sexual activities. Some escorts categorize clients according to perceived sexual orientation, which can influence the

services offered during the encounter. A detailed discussion of this work on the body is offered in Chapter Nine. Rather than an employer selecting the valorized bodily features, this aesthetic aspect of escort labour process is individuated. This work on self-appearance to embody the sexual demands of clients demonstrates that escort appearance is crucial for obtaining and doing work as an escort.

Escorts have no professional association through which they locate clients or work-related support. Not many escorts advocate such an association either. Escorts rarely correspond with one another because of how clandestine escorting is: “people I see, one’s an admiral, one’s a high ranking judge, I could get in trouble if it ever came out. It’s incredibly discrete” (Bob, Ottawa). The requirement of anonymity has been conceived of as a barrier to sex worker activism (Lopes, 2006). Male sex workers can be stigmatized if they do not keep their work quiet.<sup>28</sup> However, to be a successful escort one has to be skilled at something other than keeping secrets. If the escort is catering to the transnational capitalist class, then they need to know how to operate in elite sites:

Escorting is not just about having a nice cock and a nice ass, it is about knowing what people want and marketing it well. If you are a traveling escort like I am, you need to know how to conduct yourself in a five star hotel, how to eat at a restaurant with five forks (Ben, London).

One skill of aesthetic labour in escorting, then, is knowing when to emphasize one’s aesthetic attributes. Some authors have claimed that the skill of sex work is similar to service economy jobs, which includes surface acting or ‘putting on’ a face to socially engineer a feeling for a customer (Hochschild, 2003/1983:35). But the specific skill set of escorts depends on the clientele they cater to. Rather than a labour process marked by routinization of a range of

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<sup>28</sup> For a competing account, consider the prose piece written by Josh Kilmer-Purcell (2008) who argues that today, in the United States, several male-for-male internet escorts have celebrity status. From having dated a male escort, Kilmer-Purcell learned that a golden rule of escorting is ‘don’t bite the dick that feeds you’. Yet more and more escorts are outing their clients to gain celebrity status.

social competencies as in service economy jobs (Bolton and Boyd, 2003), the work tasks of escorts are “not unlike those of self-employed individuals or other small business owners” (Parsons et al., 2007:238). Similar to the stories that female sex workers in eastern Canada shared with Jeffrey and MacDonald (2006), the narratives of these men suggest that they prefer escorting precisely because it differs from service-sector work. If commercial sex is a way of earning an income without participating in the minimum-wage service sector, then sex work can be thought of as a way of maximizing control over the labour process, another reason for LPT to focus the work of self-employed sexual entrepreneurs.

### *Advertising*

Escorts advertise on specialty sites, just as other self-employed workers do. Ads allude to what sexual services the escort offers. The wording of ads must be precise if escorts are targeting a niche market, such as bondage. Profiles include notes about penis size and body hair, which are sexualized pieces of the escort body. There are many details to account for when making a commercial sex profile, including a description of the services offered:

When I went on Gay.com in the summer of 2007 for the first time I placed a very nice ad. Age, weight, height, with details about what I do during my massage. When I go online, I put in my bio something like Magic Blacks Hands, commercial massage, for generous gents (Sam, Ottawa).

Email correspondence between client and escort often pertains to the escort’s body. As mentioned above, pictures of the body are important for alluring clients. The displayed body and the sexualized body are what the client is keen to see and touch. Body type influences the persona the escort can create and the kind of marketing he can engage in:

If someone’s skinny and they don’t have muscle, they can’t market themselves as a jock. The thing about escorting is it’s a market where anybody could be an escort. A 90-year old grandmother could be. It’s a matter of marketing yourself in a certain way (Steve, Toronto).

Placement of an ad is no guarantee that the escort will develop a clientele. Clients post reviews of escorts, rate them with a score, which determines where the escort's profile will be positioned in the hierarchy of profiles: "if you are not in the first 10 pages forget about it. People get bored, and they're going to find people before you. You move up through the pages based on reviews" (Gabe, Toronto). If one escort offers a talent that impresses the client, and the client writes a gleaming review, this difference can put the escort ahead in the rankings. Escorts are ranked on their sexual performance, their overall charm, conversational skills, knowledge of a city, and the provision of temporary companionship.

If escorts do not receive strong reviews, their web profile plummets and is viewed by fewer potential clients. Escorts can lose repeat clients. Work can become less steady:

I think bondage is a niche market...it may have saturated. I have a few regulars that I still see but I haven't gotten many phone calls from new clients. There may have been a bad review at one place (Donald, New York).

The role of online client reviews in determining escort access to the client pool demonstrates how the escort labour process is tied to the internet. Internet technology does not determine the labour process (Thompson and McHugh, 2002) but enables certain relations and constrains the escort in various ways. Depending on the city, print advertisements may still be used. Few escorts in Canada advertise in magazines or newspapers, whereas this type of advertising is more popular in the United States and England. In England, however, prices for advertising are higher in magazines:

The advertising is expensive. That is the area where we are exploited. To get a double print box in the major magazine *Gaytimes* monthly is 200 pounds. Gaydar.com the main site in the UK charges the escorts 45 pounds per month (Oscar, London).

The cost of advertising, as well as the costs sex toys and condoms, add up. As Sean from Toronto puts it, “you have to spend some money to get some”. Ads are a costly necessity for the sexual entrepreneur, whose sexualized bodily features must be known to be enticing.

### *Getting Paid*

Escorts develop informal strategies for getting paid and negotiating fees.<sup>29</sup> There is no pay cheque. There are no contracts. Some escorts have set fees that are non-negotiable, while others are more flexible. Tyler, from Ottawa, talks about how he charges repeat clients less, a common practice amongst the self-employed:

People who meet me once a week get discounted in a major way because in the long run after four weeks or five weeks I see the benefit of not charging them the same price I charge one-time customers. It makes business sense.

Being an independent sex worker can create certain “leverage points” (Gall, 2006:34), since internet escorts control pricing. Since escorts are not subject to pricing regulations, there is the possibility of undercutting other escorts. There is animosity for escorts who pull the prices down and create an expectation with clients that certain services can be had cheaply:

I do not give \$20 blowjobs. I will judge you if you give a \$20 blowjob. You are taking my business away selling it cheap. I hate people who undercut. If everyone were to ask for the same prices it would raise the playing field (Tyler, Ottawa).

Most internet escorts set their prices high and feel that having higher prices makes them appear more professional: “You hire a lawyer that charges \$500 an hour you’re going to expect a lot more of them than a lawyer that charges \$250. Escorting is the same” (Claude, Montréal). Prices are set to maximize the income earned per meeting with a client:

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<sup>29</sup> The pay is variable, depending on the client: “some days are long and boring. I have taken clients where I did not feel like doing it but I knew it was going to be \$120 or more, or I have taken an exhausting client, but it pays \$100 a hour for ten hours because he likes to do ecstasy and jerk off to porn and all he wants you to do is jerk him off. There are times when I am like, not tonight, but the client has called three times and he cums in 15 seconds and he is out the door. Nobody makes that kind of money in so little time” (Tyler, Ottawa).

You can do five calls at \$300 and get \$1500 or five calls at \$150 and get half that. It makes sense to get more every time you see someone because if you are good looking and have youth to yourself and have a nice body it is easy to get that amount. We call them professional tricks, they want to see everyone. So if you only see them once and then they see others, you might as well get as much as you can (Byron, Houston).

Escorts treat what they do as a way of earning an income, which is reflected in their pricing.

As Oscar from London puts it, "I try to keep it like any other business".

### *Thinking of Callings it Quits*

Some escorts feel pressure to leave escorting. The reasons include loss of repeat clients who provide a steady income but are hard to come by, desire for a secure job, lifestyle changes and lack of sexual interest: "There is no victim here. It has never been an issue for me legalizing or not legalizing. This is not something I want to do for the rest of my life. I want to find a good man and move along" (Sam, Ottawa). Some escorts do not want to leave the trade but want to enjoy upward mobility – they want to see fewer but 'better quality clients' who are willing to pay more money per hour. Upward mobility in the industry requires a shift in persona, advertising, in order to attract a new clientele:

I'm going to get more professional and higher end clients...shift more toward like you know someone you know business travelers basically are the best ones you know who want, who come to the city for a weekend and plan it ahead. And they pay more money (Conrad, Toronto).

One matter that differentiates male-for-male internet escorting from other kinds of sex work is that this work is often conducted as an extension of their sex life. Sometimes escorts feel like leaving escorting because other opportunities have come along or because they are frustrated with the demands escorting places upon them:

My career is almost over. I am establishing a training business here in London. I have been here for three months and it is going really well. Once the personal trainer business picks up, escorting will drop off... (Mark, London).

In male-for-male internet escorting, there is no overarching theme of a need to exit the industry because of violence, poverty or drugs. Professionalism and entrepreneurialism mark the orientation of these men, which is paradoxical insofar as they are reluctant to embrace the idea of sex work as a way of valorizing what they do. Escorts narrate their exit from this work simply as a life course shift or a transition into other forms of work.

### **Discussion: Labour Process, Male-for-Male Internet Escorting, and Sex Work**

The male-for-male internet escorts I interviewed consider what they do to be serious income despite the lack of a social context legitimizing it as work. Male-for-male internet escorting does not have many ties to organizations, although it is organized by parameters set out by the internet (e.g. the ranking of escorts based on client reviews). Though the labour process of internet escorting has more to do with self-management than the scientific management of Braverman's (1974) version of LPT, escorts still participate in the exchanging of labour power, occupying what Marx (1976:451) calls "a particular mode of existence of capital". Escorting work has many dimensions. Since the work of male-for-male internet escorting is largely clerical, in front of a computer, the labour process is individuated, reflective of a pervasive individualization of work. Escorting involves the sexual entrepreneurialism of aesthetic labour insofar as escorts manage their bodily appearance to appease clients (Warhurst and Nickson, 2007). Escorting is also about men's bodies touching together, so it is a form of body work (Wolkowitz, 2006) placing the sexualization of men's bodies at the center of the labour process.

I have argued that male-for-male escorting requires that sociologists assess how fundamental the sexualization of men's body has become to labour process. LPT accounts for emotions and aesthetics, but more research is required to understand how sexualization of

men's bodies has become significant to some non-standard work. Accounting for how sexualities are compelled through the labour processes of late capitalism not only supplements LPT but can help overcome the seeming impasse between materialist LPT and post-structuralist sexuality studies.

The work of the entrepreneurial self-employed is situated in broader chains of commerce, relocating the competitive logic of labour process in entrepreneurial settings. Although internet escorting does not occur in an organization and is without employer control, there are many forms of self-management involved in the aesthetic labour of sexual entrepreneurship. Sociological research regarding entrepreneurship remains underdeveloped (Brazeal and Herbert, 1999). One way to develop future studies of entrepreneurs as well as understand the relationship between self-employment and surplus value is to draw from LPT. Labour process theory can be extended through analyzing non-standard forms of work, such as the work of the entrepreneurial self-employed.

I end this chapter with a brief consideration of the following question: what does the individuated labour process of men's escorting mean for understanding sex work? The sex work literature has emerged out of the sex workers' rights movement to divorce commercial sex from its associations with sin and crime. Male-for-male internet escorts are only a small portion of a diverse sex industry (Benoit and Shaver, 2006), and scholars have not analyzed how well the idea of sex work is supported by male sex workers. The commercial sex industry is diverse in terms of labour process, which makes it complicated for workers in different sectors to identify with one another (Hunt and Chamberland, 2006). What makes it somewhat difficult to apply the label of sex work to male-for-male internet escorting is the lack of overt social context outside of online competition by escorts and ranking of escorts by

clients on specialty websites. Co-worker interactions and formation of an occupational culture are largely absent.

There are two fundamental components of the sex work discourse: that sex work should be decriminalized, and that sex workers should organize as a community due to their ostensibly shared labour process. However, few of the male-for-male internet escorts I interviewed explicitly associated themselves with the idea of sex work. I asked Byron from Houston, “do you wish your work was decriminalized?” and he responded bluntly “No, cause if it was everyone would be doing it and I would not make as much money”. When I asked Josh from Toronto “Do you feel like you have an escort community?” he responded “I don’t, nor do I want that”. Some of the escorts felt connected to other escorts whereas most felt entirely disconnected: “I do not know the market, cause everyone works for themselves. People do not talk about what they do with each other, workers do not know the other workers” (Sam, Ottawa). Escorts describe themselves as entrepreneurs or self-employed, as opposed to other workers such as service-economy workers who are compelled to toil under the thumbs of management. These narratives are individual and variable, but many use labour vocabulary to narrate their touching encounters with other men while at the same time disavowing the sex work discourse. The narratives substantiate the point raised by Gall (2006) that many escorts do not identify with the sex work discourse. This is a complicated issue, however. Since the decriminalization of sex work would mean more regulation of their income, some male escorts reject the subject position ‘sex worker’ and reject the sex work movement as a whole. Yet other male escorts support the movement for the same reason. And some do identify as ‘sex workers’ despite differences in labour process. There is a fragmenting of support for the ‘sex worker’ subject position amongst escorts, although this

has not necessarily damaged the movement. However, if movement organizers are interested in growing the base of movement participants, this research suggests other recruitment and promotional strategies are necessary.

Sex worker activists have been organizing for sex worker rights, providing a context to support the attribution of work to commercial sex, but their directive comes unevenly from different sex industry sectors. Not many male-for-male internet escorts are big fans of politicizing the activities of commercial sex as work. Some escorts feel that calling what they do 'work' would make it more visible, which is the opposite of what they and their clients want. I have argued that the shift towards internet-based escorting has increased the individuated, careerist orientation of these men, and discouraged the formation of solidarity with other people whose work is similar to their own. The paradox here is that male-for-male internet escorts use labour vocabulary to talk about what they do, but many eschew association with other sex workers. The individuated labour process means that there is little interaction between escorts, a condition of the sexual entrepreneurialism required to attract and keep clientele in the clandestine world of male-for-male internet escorting.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT – TOUCHING ENCOUNTERS: MALE-FOR-MALE INTERNET ESCORTS AND THE FEIGNING OF INTIMACY**

Chapter Eight considers a key argument made by some sex work scholars – that sex workers feign intimacy with clients – in relation to Foucault’s writings concerning sexuality. The purpose of this chapter is to understand the connection between sex, sexuality and power in escorting encounters. Arguments concerning feigned intimacy between sex workers and clients started with Reiss (1961:118), who wrote that male hustlers pursue “affective neutrality” and desexualize the blowjobs they give, rationalizing the exchange as economic. Boles and Garbin (1974:139) similarly present sex work interactions as superficial. Erotic dancers, they argue, are characterized by “apathetic disengagement”. Certainly taking a role in the Goffmanian sense “is an essential lubricant for social interaction” (Takoland, 2005:308). The idea of counterfeit intimacy has had an acute impact on sex work research. Sex workers split the work self from the private self, it is argued, as a coping mechanism (Weinberg et. al, 1999; O’Connell Davidson, 1995; Høigård and Finstad, 1992). A boundary is erected between work sex and so-called real sex or home sex. A script is followed.

According to Sanders (2008:401-402),

the script is a set of shared conventions based on mutual dependency and sets out the boundaries and roles that determine control, power, initiation, pleasure... sex workers who are in control of their work and surroundings often plan and ‘act out’ the sexual script to work in their favour to gain maximum profit and control.

Oerton and Phoenix’s (2001:402) comparison of sex work and massage work posits that the encounter has to become “not-sex” for workers to maintain self worth and avoid stigma. Erotic masseuses, according to Oerton and Phoenix, are concerned only with “the repudiation of sex in the context of sex work and bodywork”. Some key questions, such as how intimacy

is defined, the connection between sex and intimacy, as well as the performative character of intimacy, remain to be explored.

Men liking sex with men have diverse understandings of intimacy that are not easily sorted out according to heteronormative understandings of human relations (Slavin, 2009). As Dean (2009:45) puts it, “the term intimacy sometimes stands as a euphemism for fucking, but it also signals the emotional experiences that accompany sex”. This definition can be expanded to include all ways of bodies coming together and the enigmatic “range of attachments” (Berlant, 2000:3) that sociality is comprised of. Earlier I suggested that starting with identity in the sociology of sexuality can lead to essentialism. Sociologists must begin with touching if we want to understand how discourse matters for (materializes in) human interaction. In Chapter Six, I discussed how the biographies of the men I interviewed are interwoven with sex and work in queer ways; a sense of self emerges only after coming together with others in touching encounters. Below I emphasize that the ‘feigning of intimacy’ is better described as part of the performativity of sexuality. Performatives of sexuality imply an intimacy script that can be followed during the encounter. However, as I have argued, there is an open tendency to sexual encounters as well, where dominant scripts concerning sexuality and intimacy are undone through the creativity of touching.

Although some of the male-for-male internet escorts I spoke with discussed scripted work rules, most narrativized their encounters with clients in a way that complicates arguments about their work being akin to service-economy labour process, based on surface acting (Bolton and Boyd, 2003). Some escorts comment on how elements of friendships emerge with clients, how work sex is an integral part of their sex life, how central the enjoyment of the encounter with clients is, and how sexuality is thought to be more diverse

than straight versus gay binaries can account for. I argue that beyond the closed tendency towards scripted sex, there is also an open tendency between escort and client towards unforeseen relations.

Arguments about surface acting and a feigning of intimacy during sex work encounters translate into a further claim: the sex that escorts and clients engage in is policed by rules against touching intimacy zones on the body (see Sanders, 2005). I argue that these claims about touching rules posit an understanding of intimacy where the sex worker is assumed to be engaged in monogamous (or procreative) sex outside of work, which is less applicable to male-for-male internet escorts. This heteronormative definition of intimacy stems from what Zatz (1997:281) calls “the lingering influence of procreative teleology” in the sociology of sexuality and sex work. As a way of making space for analysis of male-for-male internet escorting and the particular sexualities it entails, part of my purpose in this chapter is to undermine the influence of procreative teleology in the sociology of sex work.

To offset this focus on the predetermined script in sex work, and to conceptualize the diverse sexualities of male-for-male internet escorting, I draw from Foucault’s *History of Sexuality Volume I* (1978a). Foucault’s project is to provide an understanding of power beyond prohibition and sovereignty. His intervention is to conceive of sexuality not in terms of repression or law, but in terms of power, defined as “the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization” (pg. 92). Dissatisfied with the limits of gay/lesbian studies and even queer theory as it regards discussions of sexuality, my project is to make power visible in corporeal and commercial sex relations between men. Foucault identifies the body as a nexus of power, conceptualizes power as local but non-localizable, and criticizes the privileging of a universal

theory of the human subject. I argue that Foucault's writings can also help us make sense of our most touching encounters. My reading of Foucault is informed by Hacking's (2004:278) call to provide "an understanding of how the forms of discourse become part of the lives of ordinary people...". I make use of Foucault's comments about discourses of sexuality at a level of analysis that begins with the narratives people articulate about their sex.

Male-for-male internet escorts are a socio-economically privileged sector of a varied industry. The problems of violence experienced by on-street workers, female and transgendered workers, were not reported by the men I interviewed. Nor is it my intent to generalize to other cases of sex work. Though I acknowledge intimacy is performative when escorts capitalize on the confessions of clients concerning sexual categorization, my purpose is to de-emphasize the notion that intimacy is feigned by male sex workers as a matter of labour process. This chapter is organized in four parts. First I discuss how Foucault's writings concerning sexuality are significant for thinking through sex work encounters. Next I discuss the claims of some sex work scholars concerning the feigning of intimacy. I then discuss examples of the two tendencies in male-for-male internet escorting encounters: the closed tendency towards determinate, scripted exchanges and the open tendency towards indeterminate, unanticipated interactions. I conclude by arguing that these narratives present a picture of sexuality, work and self that cannot be reduced to feigned intimacy.

### ***Foucault's History of Sexuality Volume I***

To demonstrate that sexuality is not simply about repression, Foucault (1978a) argues confessions of identity have become a preoccupation in our lives. Confession is defined as "all those procedures by which the subject is incited to produce a discourse of truth about his [sic] sexuality which is capable of having effects on the subject himself [sic]" (Foucault,

1980:215-216). The confession is a technique that calls forth all details of sex. The confession will “transform your desire, your every desire, into discourse,” so to tell everything possible about one’s sex as if one was sharing a secret treasure of self identity (Foucault, 1978a:21). Pleasure is not negated. Instead, a truth is culled from pleasure to make a more subtle intervention. Power here becomes a multiplication of sexualities, producing “the encroachment of a type of power on bodies and their pleasure” (pg. 48). Foucault argues confession has become our modality for producing truth: “Western man has become a confessing animal” (pg. 59).

How does this issue of confession matter to the sex of touching encounters? As a different way of explaining the pleasure/confession connection, Foucault introduces a distinction between *ars erotica* and *scientia sexualis*. With the *ars erotica*, knowledge was transferred from body to body, and sex was simply one amongst many forms of learning how to take pleasure. With the *scientia sexualis*, sex moves to the centre of truth, which must be endlessly extracted through confession. With the *scientia sexualis*, “we demand that sex speak the truth...we demand that it tell us our truth...the deeply buried truth of that truth about ourselves which we think we possess in our immediate consciousness” (pg. 69).

The *ars erotica* does not completely disappear with the rise of the *scientia sexualis*. Rather, Foucault argues that the *scientia sexualis* functions as a proxy for the *ars erotica* in Western societies. We take pleasure in thinking we know the truth about ourselves. We take pleasure in thinking we know the truth about others. In sum, Foucault argues there is a proliferation of discourses about sexuality through confessions and ‘telling the truth’ about oneself. All one needs is “a little skill in urging it to speak” (pg. 77). Foucault writes that “homosexuality began to speak on its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or

'naturalness' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified" (pg. 101). Put another way, people have come to make little homes for themselves in identity categories.

I have argued that through Foucault we can make out two tendencies in the sexual encounter. The first tendency, the closed tendency, is the incitement to discourse, the passion to make confessions about one's sex and self. The encounter between the escort and the client is not a simple economic exchange, nor is it an automatic exploitation of the sex worker by the client. Whereas the exchange assumes what will be given, the encounter is based on the unforeseen (Althusser, 2000). This encounter is imbued with power as a game of truth. Escorts are not selling sex per se (or their bodies per se), but are brokering in 'truths' about themselves and about their clients. The confession is oriented towards maximizing what can be made out of the truth of sex. But the second tendency, the open tendency, which we hear about in Foucault's later interviews, is towards a different economy of bodies and pleasures. This tendency does not depend on ruses of sexuality, it is unanticipated, and it parts from the general deployment of sexuality by being located in the realm of friendship and compassion (Eribon, 2001). Foucault suggests this different economy of bodies and pleasures could rally against the science of sexuality. The open tendency, for Foucault, is associated with friendship as a way of life, which I discuss further below.

There are two tendencies in male-for-male internet escorting, one that definitely sexualizes the relation and one that potentially de-sexualizes the relation. But how can an erotic relation between two men be de-sexualized? This question returns us to the idea of the *ars erotica* versus the *scientia sexualis*. Relations between men often operate with reference to sexual categories. The diversity of queer masculinities within the gay identity category are

many (e.g. the ‘twink,’ the ‘bear,’ the ‘daddy,’ the ‘muscle mary,’ the ‘studio gay,’ the ‘gay-for-pay’). These self-fashioned identities are oriented towards what Foucault calls the *scientia sexualis*, since they track “along the course laid out by the general deployment of sexuality” (Foucault, 1978a:157), policing touch towards an ossified sense of sexuality. Yet these relations between men are not without an *ars erotica*. Those in the encounter need to touch and feel their way through it. The second tendency, the open tendency, is towards erotic relationality (Ricco, 2002). Sometimes these relations occur not so much on the basis of how they can be classified by participants, but instead how they relate to pleasure or how pleasure itself is the centre of the relation.

There are two tendencies (a power that plays on the truth, and an erotic relationality for the sake of pleasure) possible in any sexual encounter. While historical context and place matter, thinking about discourses concerning sexuality as abstract and fixed by history and place is restrictive. Sexuality is also produced and mutated in the interactions of encounters. In male-for-male internet escorting, the use of pleasure mingles with identity and categorization insofar as clients select escorts based on fixed identity forms (e.g. the ‘daddy,’ the ‘twink’) and associated sexual practices, thereby sexualizing the relation. Escorts select clients based on their understandings of identity and sexual practices. Yet the encounter can spiral into unpredictable pleasures that border on friendship, de-sexualizing the encounter and challenging phallogentric and identity-based understandings of eroticism.

### **Feigning Intimacy?**

The issue of feigned intimacy has a loose connection to sexual scripting theory, discussed in Chapter Two. Gagnon (2004b:140) writes that sexual scripts function to make sure “an actor is meeting the expectations of other persons and guiding his or her conduct in

terms of the conduct of others,” which indicates that it is the script that provides meanings. However, as I have argued in earlier chapters, sexual scripting theory is limited insofar as it tends only to account for the closed tendency of any sexual encounter. “Sexuality is rendered selfish” in writings that reduce sex to something fixed by a script (Dowsett, 1996:274). The idea of a sexual script detaches sex from animal behaviour and emphasizes conduct, yet the propensity is to treat these scripts as fixed instead of involving an unforeseen element (Plummer, 1982). As I argued in Chapter Three, to treat scripts as fixed would contradict Mead’s and Blumer’s comments about how meaning is produced in and through interaction. Claims about surface acting and the feigning of intimacy during sex work encounters treat sexual scripts as fixed, failing to explore the open tendency of the encounter. Below is an exegesis of this literature regarding the professional feigning of intimacy.

#### *Browne & Minichiello*

Browne and Minichiello (1995:598) explore how workers categorize clients, the meanings that workers attach to sex, and the so-called “psychic contexts of male commercial sex”. Browne and Minichiello claim that condom use

demarcates work from personal sex, and *symbolizes a false sex where real human contact is not possible, a mask is worn, and the true self is not shared*. Condoms are seen as an excellent physical and psychological barrier between the worker and clients, especially those they find dirty and repugnant (pg. 603, italics added).

Browne and Minichiello’s comments about the ‘true self’ not only assume a great deal about the psychology of sex workers, but suggest that when a worker slips on a condom without a client noticing it is because the worker wishes to maintain this distinction between work self and private self. Here, work sex and so-called private sex are conceptualized as mutually exclusive. This problematic distinction between feigned and real self is further upheld in

claims such as “after the sexual sale, sex workers need to switch off the work personality and go on with living their lives” (pg. 614). Browne and Minichiello assume both client and worker enter the interaction with ready-made sexualities. Yet as I have argued, sexual encounters can also be creative and productive of meanings. To ease up on these claims about the ‘true self,’ Browne and Minichiello could have argued that intimacy and friendliness with clients is performative within the context of work relations, but they did not.

It is only recently that Minichiello and colleagues (2008:167) acknowledge “both workers and clients may realize that what the transaction will look like is partly situational... unpredictable and negotiated as the event unfolds, sometimes over several encounters with the same client”. I am not questioning that female sex workers face pressures concerning femininity, reproductive health and body image not experienced by most male escorts. I am arguing that sex work does not inevitably induce a split between the feigned and the real self.

### *Sanders*

The notion of feigned intimacy is similar to Hochschild’s (2003/1983) influential distinction between emotional labour (a paid feigning of self to appease customers) and emotion work (experiencing so-called real emotions in private contexts). Hochschild’s approach assumes a dichotomy between the feigned and the real self (Theodosius, 2008), which Sanders adopts to understand indoor female sex work. Sanders (2005:319, italics added) argues that “sex workers create a *manufactured identity* specifically for the workplace as a self-protection mechanism to manage the stresses of selling sex as well as crafting the work image as a business strategy to attract and maintain clientele”. Sanders considers a “certain kind of identity in the sex industry, borne out of the specific requirements of male desires that clash with female desires to separate sex as an economic unit from romantic

relations in private, is intrinsic to how some sex workers perform the 'prostitute' role," assumed to be a feigned self (pg. 323). There are also claims about the policing of touching. For instance, Sanders discusses bodily exclusion zones: "these parts of the body and specific sex acts are considered *too intimate* to be sold, or reserved for the worker's own sexual pleasure" (pg. 327, italics added). This assumes, however, that the escort's pleasure is not part of the power relations between escort and client. Sanders also discusses the condom as a psychological barrier: "Closely tied to the notions of creating a *non-intimate* experience for the sex provider during the commercial sex act, the condom is consistently used in commercial sexual transactions, not only as a health protection mechanism but as a psychological barrier" (ibid. italics added). Here Sanders introduces a distinction between the intimate and the non-intimate. According to this claim, some sex acts are 'too intimate' to share with a client. The condom is used to make the touching encounter 'non-intimate'. However, such a claim inscribes a romanticized distinction between 'real' intimacy reserved for some other set of relations, and feigned intimacy or non-intimacy that is offered to the client. She argues sex workers like to stay on top and be dominant as a ploy to control the situation: "sex workers do not themselves engage in the sexual fantasies that the client requests but instead act out a set of prepared, *routine speeches and predictable interactions* that they repeat with other customers" (ibid., italics added). Sanders uses a set notion of intimacy to explain escort and client relations instead of using a thick description of escort narratives to attempt and explain the diverse meanings intimacy has in commercial sex.

Admittedly, Sanders is discussing a different sample of sex workers, and feigned intimacy with clients could be a major element of the labour process for them. However, Sanders' account represents only the closed tendency of sexual encounters. While stereotypes

regarding sex workers as disease vectors are broken down in these claims about feigned intimacy and labour process, new misconceptions of sex workers as anxiety-ridden, profit-motivated individuals are seemingly established. Sex is conceptualized as work (read: boring, routine, repetitive), but, as I have argued in this text, sex work encounters have a closed and open tendency. Given how diverse labour process and sexualities are across the commercial sex industry, this claim about feigned intimacy does not fit well for all forms of sex work. I argue that these claims about intimate and non-intimate realms as described by Sanders must be qualified to be applied to the case of male-for-male internet escorting.

### *Brewis & Linstead*

Scholars have been reluctant to explore how claims about female sex work (which are treated as claims about sex work in general) are supported when a specific case like male-for-male internet escorting is taken into account. Sometimes specifics claim about female sex work are generalized to all forms of sex work, which is part of the issue here with the idea of feigned intimacy. The work relation becomes cast as a façade while the home relation is conceptualized as what really counts – a heteronormative claim. Sexuality is conceived of as ready-made. Brewis and Linstead (2000:86, italics added) likewise argue that:

One requirement for the emotional management of one's self is the maintenance of *an appropriate degree of psychological distance from the encounter*, or at least from certain aspects of it. One means of achieving this distance and bolstering the work persona for some prostitutes is the use of drugs.

Rather than sexually compulsive, destitute and exploited, sex workers are thought of as controlling the time of their encounters to assert that work sex is not something having bearing on their non-work sex or intimate relations (also see Brewis and Linstead, 1998). Yet Brewis and Linstead (2000:94) offer a proviso: “prostitutes do not necessarily, in every

encounter, want or need to maintain these strict divides”. Not all sex workers want to or are able to separate a work self from a private self, and it is this argument I build on in analyzing the specific sexualities at play in male-for-male internet escorting.

### **The Sexual Stories of Male-for-Male Internet Escorts**

Some of the escorts I spoke with did try to separate their work and private lives. For instance, Sean from Toronto argued that he had to go into character to go to work, and that “if you show emotion, you are fucked”. Nevertheless, the bulk of escorts told a different set of sexual stories about their work, stories that complicate the claim that intimacy is feigned. The idea of intimacy is loaded with associations of monogamy, heterosexuality, and procreation. While “a queer baby boom” and the rise in popularity of gay marriage has broken down “the orthodoxy of nonprocreative homosexuality” (Marcus, 2005:206), this is not the case with male-for-male internet escorts. The way that male-for-male escorts talk about clients evinces that intimacy is not determined by meanings pinned to procreative sex for these men. Escorts have various understandings of intimacy, and sex is not always part of the picture. As put by one escort,

With some of my guests I have a lot of intimacy. Last Friday night there was a guy who booked me for the whole night. He took me out to a fancy restaurant, Italian. We went home after and he got a nice massage. It was very late. He wanted to have a shower. Spent a good time, playing around. Went to bed at two in the morning, did not wake up until 9am. It was a lot of intimacy. A lot of kissing and cuddling (Sam, Ottawa).

This escort does not talk about his encounter in terms of acting according to some script or feigning a sense of self, although certainly the ‘kissing and cuddling’ the escort and client share were performative and the sequence of events (supper, massage, snuggling) follows a romantic script. Although it is difficult to tell from Sam’s narrative whether this intimacy is

highly performative or not, male-for-male escorts talk a great deal about how ‘honest’ their relations are with clients. One escort discussed the pleasure he has with some clients:

...the guy I’ve known for 15 years, that’s always fun. It’s always different, he lets me be creative and he’ll give me parameters to work with him and then I take it from there. And he likes that, to be surprised, so that’s always thrilling for me. We always have a good time together (Ricky, Toronto).

Although there is an inclination in these narratives to downplay the performativity of intimacy that is part of all touching encounters, some escorts emphasize they are not faking or acting with clients:

...it comes out of trust and honesty. The thing I hear the most often is, ‘Wow you resemble your picture, thanks, you didn’t lie. You are what you say you are, you’re not pretentious, you’re not arrogant. You seem down to earth. You seem to honestly be having a good time with me. You’re not just doing it and watching your watch’... Because a lot of them have been with enough guys to know when a guy or the person is just faking it. I am what I say I am, how I look, I’m genuinely interested and I have fun too (Ricky, Toronto).

Escorts often have repeat interactions with a client, which makes their encounters situated very closely to biography, including their sexual biography. Over time, escort encounters with clients lead to a touching rapport or a “corporeal itinerary” (Diprose, 2002:107) between them, insofar as habits of putting their bodies together are built up. These escorts do not claim to be acting with clients any more than they would with any partner.

As I argued in Chapter Three as well as in Chapter Six, the issue of biography is central in male-for-male internet escorting, insofar as the logic of the lure that male-for-male internet escorts follow is based on anonymous sociality involving the itinerant element of cruising. For these men, the sociality of non-commercial sex and commercial sex can be very similar. Talking about the touching he shares with clients, one escort reported:

I do almost everything I would do with a boyfriend. I’m very limited sexually, but intimate-wise I have no problem, kissing, because for them you can get a blowjob anywhere, like I can get a blowjob in 90 seconds here, right now, but getting someone

to snuggle for an hour is not the same thing and just to talk, watching TV with somebody naked on the bed, for some people that's a bigger thrill. It works for me too because I don't have a boyfriend (Gabe, Toronto).

This sexual story is not simply about sex work but is about the biography of the escort and how this links up with the relations he forms with clients. The issue of sexual biography cannot be separated from the worker persona of the escort. In addition, sexuality is performative during the encounter, which means the distinction between feigned intimacy and 'real' intimacy is hard to sustain. Some escorts take pride in not faking:

I think they enjoy the way I am. They are attracted to me...I do not play. I have to get something out of it more than the money. I have to have fun or otherwise I will not put myself through it. The fact that I am not faking, because I choose people I do not have to do that because I cannot really do that, fake it (Chris, Montréal).

The conventional idea of 'intimacy' encodes subtle messages about appropriate sexuality. For men who have sex with men, intimacy is not governed by "the illusion of long-term commitment or the heteronormative construction of good, clean, and reproductive sex" (Green et al., 2010:20). The escorts I interviewed express that they care about their clients enough to not want to insult them or waste their time:

I met somebody off of it who I've now seen him three times and all he wants to do is rub your back and hold you and just chat. And you know what I said to him the first night, 'I'm like you know what, honey,' I said, 'Don't call me like for an hour, you know what you don't live that far, just next time you call me, call me and I'll come and spend the night'. He's like, 'You will and you won't charge me extra?' 'You don't want to have sex with me, all you want to do is just like sleep beside somebody' and he's a friendly person and I got along with him ...it's not so much of a business transaction (Eddy, Toronto).

In other words, not all escorts treat clients as income units. Chapter Six argued that the biographies of these men are wrapped up with escorting in specifically queer ways, which means anonymous and itinerant sexual encounters are prevalent, be they commercial or not. It has been argued that "because many gay men can more readily separate physical sex from

romantic and domestic commitments, they enjoy greater latitude to negotiate diverse terms for meeting their sexual and emotional needs” (Stacey, 2005:1926). Some of these men are defiant of the tendency towards containment sexuality and vanilla sex in queer communities (Sender, 2003). Therefore, because the sex of their work is often the sex of their lives, claims about surface acting and feigned intimacy with clients are less applicable.

### *Enjoying Sex*

The stories of male-for-male internet escorts regarding their work present something of a counter-trend to the claim that sex workers treat the sex of the work as a series of instrumental tasks as in the service-economy. This is because many male-for-male internet escorts are not set up in monogamous partnerships outside of work, and even if they are sex work remains a crucial part of their biography. When male-for-male internet escorts do have partners, sometimes their partners are also escorts or are aware of their work and support it. There is a different set of understandings in this sex work concerning the relevance of itinerant or non-monogamous sex. Bolton (1995) discusses the *communitas* fostered and extended by this logic of the lure and its emphasis on non-exclusiveness when it comes to partners. Most escorts do not set up so-called real sex as that which happens with their partners and work sex as a technical set of operations on client bodies. To the contrary, several escorts discuss how much they enjoy the sex of their work – not because they are sexually compulsive as some public health researchers have suggested (Parsons et al., 2001), but because work sex is their sex life:

I do not have sex privately so I am always ready. Even if the guy is not hot enough, if I have not had sex for three or four days it is not tough to get hard when he touches me. I do not really act. Unless I have two guests the same day. I have to come with one. I make sure all the guests come. But I need to come if I have two guests. People who like to swallow, you have to provide. When the guest is my type I enjoy it more

than when the guest is not my type. But I do not act. You have to love it to do it. It has to be fun. I do not have a boyfriend so this is partly my sex life (Sam, Ottawa).

Sam's narrative suggests that the sex of his work is the sex of his life, and there is no separation. The next narrative, from an escort who is 64 years of age and has been working for over two decades, demonstrates the same point: "I had not had much of a sex life outside of the work for many years" (Gerald, Toronto). It is assumed that sex workers feign intimacy because they have a so-called real sex life to go back to when work is over. With male-for-male internet escorts, the sex of the work is part of the sex of their life. The performativity of sexuality makes it hard to sustain the separation between feigned and real intimacy with these men, but the separation between feigned and real sex is even more implausible.

The work sex of male-for-male internet escorts cannot be separated from their sex life and their work cannot be separated from their biography. Some escorts impress clients so much during encounters that clients begin asking the escort for sex outside of the commercial context: "'Wow, you're great, can I bottom for you?' I actually get tops ask to bottom for me" (Ricky, Toronto). Ricky enjoys the sex of his work, not because he has no sex life outside of work, but because he feels enjoying sex is an integral part of his job: "what I find I have to do is hold back a lot" (Ricky, Toronto). The sex of his work is not policed according to procreative and monogamous expectations of sexual conduct, but is enjoyed as an integral part of the encounter. The encounter is described as an 'honest' interaction by some escorts:

...there is a guy that he lives in Chelsea he's a very hot, got a great body, and has a great apartment and you spend all night having sex and it's a lot of fun... there is another guy you know and I have clients that they like to see me with other escorts so they tell me to pick the guys up so that happens a lot actually and that's you know you get paid for that you know you cannot beat that. And a lot of times really, I'm having fun you know, I'm really having fun and it's good because the more fun I have the more fun they have and the more money I get. Because you know, and I just feel good because I'm being honest. I'm not taking advantage of anybody... I don't pretend that I'm not having a good time. I really let myself go (Roberto, New York).

The sex of escorts' work cannot be separated out from their life histories, which feeds back into their talk about how intimacy in the encounter is not real, not fake, but performative as in any other sex encounter. The following escort narrative also evinces a situation of enjoyment, and of a relation developing, not manipulation by either the client or the escort:

Sometimes you think 'I am being paid to do this?' I have had some gorgeous clients and cannot believe I am being paid to do it. There was a guy I had seen for a long time, he was part of a couple but he liked me too much so had to end it with me because the partner was jealous, but on one occasion, he booked me for the whole night, good money, but he said from now on we are not client-escort but we are just friends, we went out to sex clubs, I could do what I wanted, we went back to his place, we ordered more and more escorts, wine, it was a huge sex party and I was being paid just to be there with him (Oscar, London).

These narratives about the enjoyment of sex suggest that there are specific sexualities at work in male-for-male internet escorting that differ from other commercial sex sectors, which the sociology of sex work must be attuned to in order to understand the labour process and lives of male-for-male internet escorts. That male-for-male internet escorts enjoy sex is not the most interesting sociological finding. While it is important to acknowledge how prevalent enjoyment of sex is in male-for-male internet escorting, as previously stated in Chapters Two and Three, sex is never just sex. Power operates even in the most intimate of relations and itinerant of encounters. The enjoyment of sex is connected to the deployment of sexuality through providing a context in which to make the pleasure of identity intelligible.

### *What's 'Gay' Got to Do with It?*

As discussed in Chapter Five, the men I spoke with have various understandings of what 'gay' means. Some male-for-male internet escorts fully embrace the gay identity category in their talk about themselves, while others resist binary understandings of sexuality. In this section I discuss how male-for-male internet escorts categorize themselves

sexually and how categories of sexuality influence the way escorts arrange touching encounters with clients. Some escorts felt pressure from clients and from their existing network of friends to perform a stereotypically 'gay' identity: "Labeling myself as gay and hanging around only with gay people, it limits you. There is more to the world than being a man who likes to sleep with men and being in the gay bar... is there such a thing as straighter gay sex?" (Leon, Ottawa). Though he enjoys having sex with men, Leon feels there are too many strings attached with fixed identity. Similarly, Bruce from Toronto reports:

I don't really consider myself a part of the gay community; I don't like the gay community... I find there's a lot of hypocrisy in the gay community because a lot of people in the gay community are constantly you know bitching and complaining that you know society discriminates against the gay community ...then I don't really see much effort being made for them to sort of break the myths of the stereotypes. I see them embracing these stereotypes. I used to live in the gay community for a few years and I didn't like it because I found it to be a very promiscuous lifestyle. I found that even within the gay community there is a lot of discrimination...I just found it very ironic that you have this community of people that are bitching and complaining that there is a lot of discrimination and this and that and then right in the community there is discrimination against themselves.

Bruce felt that the gay community was as exclusionary and limited by stereotypes as other sexual communities, which makes it hard to refer to 'community' in relation to men who have sex with men. These stereotypes are fostered by commercial endeavours that capitalize on marketable images of gay. The 'pink economy' refers to a now well-established market in global cities that caters to gay and lesbian consumers and bases its products on stereotypical images of gay and lesbian life (Cover, 2004a). Some escorts were highly critical of the pink economy identity that is pre-packaged and consumable:

You can consume it, it's in the gay parade, everyone can consume it... you won't get beaten on the street, oh it's marvelous. But that is very recent and it's not a good or bad thing in itself even if I think that the gay parade is well I really don't feel well about it at all, I don't like it (Jacques, Montréal).

Other escorts were more antagonistic towards stereotypical and commercial gay identity:

...there are not a lot of gay people who I enjoy to be with because everything is always about them, what they like, their interests, driven by this idea that everything behind who they are is gay, they always remind you they are gay, and at the end I do not give a shit because this is a person. I find it superficial (Chris, Montréal).

As discussed in Chapter Five, 'gay' does not have a fixed meaning, even in the so-called gay community. For Chris, it did not make sense to limit his relations with others in terms of the identity category they lived out their lives according to, and this included his relations with clients. He also did not feel that gay men are subject to discrimination where he lived:

I never understood what you have to be proud of when you are gay. I never understood what you are proud of when you are heterosexual... In Montréal now I do not see how it is hard to be gay, it is easy...there are reasons why you do not get things in your life but it is not because you are gay (Chris, Montréal).

As argued in Chapter Five, although they all enjoy sex with men, these escorts live according to sometimes starkly different senses of sexuality. The encounter itself is where sexualities are contested, formed, elaborated upon, strategically deployed, such that sexuality cannot be presupposed in an advance. The sociology of sex work must understand how diverse sexualities operate in male-for-male internet escorting.

The gay versus straight binary of sexuality does shape some male escorting encounters. Some escorts judge other men who have slept with women, an example of gay men's sexism (Ward, 2000). Other clients enjoy finding men who are sexually expansive and do not limit their activities to those played out as part of a narrow identity category. One escort told a story about the way these identity practices matter to his work:

A lot of guys love the straight acting guy so a lot of guys get off on the fact that I also fuck girls occasionally and am turned on by it and legitimately jerk off on porn sometimes ...some are grossed out by the fact that my cock has been in a vagina ...I get fewer and fewer of, 'Oh that's gross' kind of thing, most of my friends are more questioning, 'really, that's, did you like that, did you get off on it?' They're more like that than, 'That's gross, fish' that kind of stupid bullshit which I hate. The gay misogyny bullshit (Ricky, Toronto).

In the words of Dollimore (2001:371), “one of the most embarrassing aspects of gay history has been the overt misogyny of some gay men”. While for some internet escorts these sexual identity categories were malleable and permeable, others relied more on fixed understandings of gay versus straight in their work. Some escorts categorize clients according to perceived sexual orientation, which influences their comportment and talk during the encounter:

It depends if the guy is gay or not. If the guy is gay, he wants to kiss and he wants to cuddle. He wants that relationship feeling. If he’s straight or if he’s married, he wants to suck cock and he wants to get his dick sucked and he wants to maybe like get fucked or whatever...I will fucking fight tooth and nail to not do it just because I’m not a top anyways and to me, like it’s just, it’s too much bullshit. I don’t need to get like, you know shove my dick up some shitty ass (Eddy, Toronto).

For some escorts, ‘gay’ was an identity they embraced when they were younger, though they had since engaged in a wider range of sexual activities and no longer felt ‘gay’ represented who they were. For others, the idea of ‘gay’ versus ‘straight’ appeared in discussions of client sexuality but not their own.

As I argued in Chapter Seven, people are impelled to ‘do’ sexuality in economic contexts, though queer theories of sexuality and gender have failed to show how identity performatives are impelled through work imperatives (Cover, 2004b). Queer theory has also failed to demonstrate how discourses that inform performativity are translated through touch. It is to a discussion of how performatives of sexuality operate in the encounter between client and escort that I now turn.

### *Finding One’s Spot on the Sexual Mosaic*

Drawing from Foucault to discuss power in the escorting encounter allows for analysis to move beyond a consideration of exploitation and repression. Sex work literature has not considered how male escorts strategically arrange the joint action of themselves with

clients according to discourses of sexuality. This kind of emphasis allows for a productive view of power, the view of power Foucault provides, since it is an action that enables another action although only insofar as the action meets certain criterion of intelligibility.

Sexual stereotypes and categories operate in the communication between escorts and clients. Discussing the city of Toronto, one internet escort said “people tend to advertise more here what they are, top or bottom... you don’t go home with someone unless you know...I’ll let you know this about Toronto, we call it a city of bottoms” (Ricky, Toronto). In saying ‘you don’t go home with someone unless you know,’ one might assume the escort is referring to HIV/AIDS status? But Ricky is referring to sexual preference, the kinds of kinks and fetishes, the kinds of positions and forms of play people like to engage in as an imagined extension of their sexual identity. Pleasure and power are related here. There is a confessional element built in to sex work encounters, such that the client is implored to comment on their own supposed sexual truth and what the corresponding activity to engage in is (Grenz, 2005). The confession is “an operation by which the self constitutes itself in discourse with the assistance of another’s presence and body” (Butler, 2004a:163). The client tells something of themselves so the escort body can relay its deed in the prescribed manner.

Foucault (1978a:47) suggests discourses of sexuality are deployed strategically through positioning on a proliferating “sexual mosaic”. While many male-for-male internet escorts have come to a more complex understanding of what sexuality means through their work, some do deploy discourses of sexuality strategically in their relations with clients to align the services provided with the client’s understandings of self and sex. Parts of the body put into play become read as the confession substantiated, the truth of identity unbound. Power permeates the relation, not as repression, but as a game of truth. In the words of one

escort, “I think conversation is important to get to know people to size them up and see what type of people they are. It’s important to get into their head before you get into their bed” (Mike, New York). Male-for-male internet escorts do sometimes capitalize on the confession of clients about where they find themselves on the sexual mosaic.

What escorts do sexually with clients is not an expression of some predisposition. Instead, the range of activities is built up over time, an outcome of previous escorting encounters. Sexuality is not fixed but in flux, and the sex escorts have is influenced by many previous touching encounters. Escorts are generally comfortable with sexual activities including a range of kinks and fetish work. For instance, as Tyler from Ottawa puts it:

Piss play is fine with me. Because it is piss I will not swallow it, but you can piss in my mouth or piss on me, that is fine, I like water sports. Not into scat. On my profile I say this is what I do and this is what I don’t do, and what I don’t do is very minimal.

An important part of sexuality when it comes to internet escorting is signaling one’s sexual persona, which invokes the idea of what activities one will partake in. The process of signaling sexuality in escorting has a confessional dimension, since the escort often has to ask the client to confess what sorts of activity they want to do, and the client sometimes asks the escort to confess something about their sense of identity:

I want them to be very clear about what they want. I want them to just know what they want. Because they will get frustrated if they don’t know what they want because I won’t give them what they want just because they don’t know and I don’t know. I need them to think about it. I can help them, I think there’s a big part of my job to help people find like try, try things and to know if they like it or if they don’t like it, to discuss it (Jacques, Montréal).

Dean (2009:33) argues that “anonymous sex frequently is punctuated by interesting conversation”. This conversational element is central to escorting as well. By coaxing confessions from clients, the escort can capitalize on the client’s sense of sexuality by moving the encounter in particular directions. This is the closed tendency of the sexual

encounter: making conduct fit according to fixed categories of sexuality and scripts for sex.

Confessions of sexuality can be capitalized on by escorts:

it's not about having the best body in the world, it's not about having the biggest dick in the world, it's the fact about being able to relate to people and to make people feel comfortable and to figure out what people want from you sexually. It stills shocks me to this day, even when people are paying for sex they have difficulty articulating exactly what they want (Claude, Montréal).

Some clients ask escorts if they will fulfill a particular fantasy or a kink. What clients want from escorts varies from city to city, and some escorts develop specific understandings of sexuality related to the cities they work in. Local sexual contexts develop that escorts work to their advantage, so that it is possible to speak of niche markets developing:

Toronto is a city where people are incredibly stressed out all the time, possibly more so than any other city in the world that I've ever visited including New York. And I think for a lot of people the experience of being a bottom in a sexual situation, not even necessarily exclusively about getting fucked or getting penetrated but about that experience of sort of letting somebody else use your body for their pleasure I think it really serves as a source of release for a lot of people from their stressed out every day lives of work (Claude, Montréal).

The way that escorts position themselves sexually depends on the city they are working in at the time. For instance, as mentioned above, some cities demand more 'bottom' services than others. Moreover, sexuality is irreducible to particular genital relations. Some escorts discuss how the diversity of sexualities draws attention away from the penis, which is usually thought to be the proverbial centre of male sexuality:

With escorting it's very much that way. It's all about my cock or their cock. I find sex in general too based on the cock. Escorting yes, definitely very cock based, even guys who want to have their ass played with. A lot of these people paying for sex aren't as experienced and haven't honed in as much on or narrowed down what gets them off. Most guys I play with couldn't care less if I saw their cocks or touched it. Like the guy tonight, I think I've seen his cock once in a year or whatever, eight months, it's always covered and his ass is there and it's all we need. He doesn't care because he's into his ass (Ricky, Toronto).

The client has an image of the truth of sexuality that they are living out through the encounter and that the escort can cater to by ‘doing’ sexuality accordingly. The escort negotiates that demand to provide a satisfaction of taking pleasure (and capitalizing on) confessions.

This confessional element is about power that circulates between escort and client. The scenarios outlined in this chapter are suggestive of a more distributed field of power relations, where both escort and client have a capacity to produce an effect drawing on pervasive sexual stereotypes. Locating the truth of the matter for clients before or at the beginning of the encounter makes it easier for escorts to play into the fantasy clients may have, in essence capitalizing on sexuality. London England, the city Ben works in, influences what kinds of niches and tropes of sexuality can be worked in developing an escort persona:

...people in London want a type of sex. I became interested in extreme sex, fetish sex, domination, master/slave scenes, leather play, I learned more and then I became more specialized. Not many escorts in London offer these kinds of services, know how to do them well. I was already getting interested in this stuff but London pushed me more. In London, people are already experimenting with their sex, and you do not need to be an escort to be experimenting with sex in London, but I was in London and I was interested in experimenting and I was able to use this beneficially for my work. Looking at the profiles of escorts in London, I can see there are only a few escorts who had good knowledge of extreme sex and fetish sex. So then I started a profile on a site for people who play these kinds of games (Ben, London).

These men must negotiate their sex relations with clients within the parameters established by discourses of sexuality. Gaining knowledge of the extreme sex scene exemplifies a gearing up for Foucault’s game of truth. Discourses of sexuality make the encounter a game of truth “related to specific techniques that human beings use to understand themselves” (Foucault, 1988:18). Finding one’s spot on the sexual mosaic is a way of positioning sexuality in relation to this circuitous model of power.

Although sometimes sexual stereotypes are pursued strategically within these contexts, the sexual encounter is not fully determined by gender or sex scripts. In each

encounter, there are differentials in terms of the potential for the strategic deployment of sexuality. That sexuality is not dual, but many, multiple and multiplying, means that the outcomes of sex between people are open-ended rather than fully scripted.

*Unanticipated Elements of the Encounter, including Friendships*

The encounter between client and escort is not predetermined by some fixed notion of 'gay' sexuality or queer masculinity, since what 'gay' means is variable. The encounter between client and escort has an open tendency towards unanticipated relations. Claude found that escorting work had an unanticipated impact on his sex life:

I'm providing emotional intimacy to a lot of people as my job, I find that it changes the way my sexuality plays out outside of that and then outside of sex trade work I'm actually looking for the hot and dirty fuck fest because I have all of those sort of emotional intimate touchy feely needs satisfied within the context of my work so I don't need that with my other partners... one of the kind of regular clients that I have in Montréal is like he's like a hard core S&M top so within the context of the work that I'm doing here, I'm actually finding I'm craving more emotional intimacy from the other primary partner (Claude, Montréal).

The itinerant and anonymous sex often pursued by men who have sex with men can generate unforeseen possibilities for relations with others. The next escort also stresses how much this work changed the way he viewed sex, intimacy and relationships:

There are times when gay men have a sexual imperative, but I do not have it to the same extent or I do not have it as much anymore. All the messing around on the internet all night trying to get someone to come over and then when they arrive they are not what you expect. When someone comes around and they are not quite what I expect or they are not what I want, I do not go through with it. That is a good thing. It gives me a sense of self, I do not just take anything at work and so why should I do it in my private life (Oscar, London).

Encounters between escorts and clients produce unanticipated meanings and ways of bodies coming together. The claim that these encounters are scripted and made predictable by escorts for the purpose of controlling labour process is misleading as it concerns the specific

case of male-for-male internet escorts. Even when we try to control encounters, even when we try to script everything, there are always unanticipated elements. Mead (1967/1934) argues that if a person “knows what he [sic] is going to do, even there he may be mistaken...the resulting action is always a little different from anything which he could anticipate” (pg. 177). In some instances, the relation of the escort and the client changes. The encounter is undergoing desexualization and resexualization, changing the meaning of the relation for the people involved – these two tendencies are always at work in the encounter. Sometimes grids of intelligibility break down. Foucault (1990a:4) recognized silence as “a specific form of experiencing a relationship with others,” one that he thought of as integral to friendship and pleasure. Friendship is one possible outcome of the encounter related to Foucault’s thoughts about relations beyond the categorization regime imposed by sexuality.

According to Foucault (1997a:135) “the problem is not to discover in oneself the truth of one’s sex, but, rather, to use one’s sexuality henceforth to arrive at a multiplicity of relationships”. People must invent a formless relation, which is friendship, “the sum of everything through which they can give each other pleasure” (pg. 136) in the words of Foucault. Affection, friendship, fidelity, camaraderie and companionship are what Foucault associates with erotic relationality. Foucault argues that the goal is not to liberate desire but to lead a life towards pleasure: “We must escape and help others escape the two readymade formulas of the pure sexual encounter and the lovers’ fusion of identities” (pg. 137). The aesthetics of existence Foucault associates with desexualization and creation is not an individual project, but one that starts with the potential inventiveness of encounters.

Beyond sex workers enjoying sex with clients and this being part of their sex life, beyond the impact sex work can have on escorts’ understanding of self and their deployment

of sexuality during work, and beyond the as of yet unknown, clients and escorts can also develop friendships. To be sure, friendships often develop out of sex between men (Nardi, 2007; Adam, 2007). Sometimes the escort and client become activity partners. In the words of one internet escort, “I’ve gone out of their age range type of thing but, yeah, we’re still good friends” (Claude, Montréal). Boles and Elifson (1994) report that on-street male sex workers have trouble making friends with clients and each other as well – they are stereotypical loners. Not so with escorts. Of repeat clients, Jeff from New York said “we probably know more about each other than our families or our spouses”. Likewise, Harvey from Montréal describes that with repeat clients he feels

more relaxed. More open. More trust. They feel more comfortable, I feel more comfortable...it is not business anymore. They talk about their lives, what is going on. I talk about my life. We are friends. It gets to the point where I do not even want to charge them money. Because we have fun together.

Of his repeat clients, Harvey adds that, if he were to retire, “I would miss them”. Friendship occupies an important position in Foucault’s later writing about the self. Friendship between men not only challenges heteronormative understandings of masculinity but also is a form of desexualized intimacy, a form of touching that “is perhaps the end of this dreary desert of sexuality, the end of the monarchy of sex” (Foucault, 1990b:116).

Recent contributions in the sociology of sexuality (see Moon, 2008; Bernstein, 2001; Prasad, 1999) argue that clients of sex workers prefer the honesty of sex workers to the ‘mind games’ people play in the dating scene. Here it is escorts who prefer clients to potential dates outside escorting. Bruce discussed the way his interest in intimacy is contented by clients, and that clients can become more like lovers:

I get more honesty from a fucking escort client than I do from a guy that I meet, like it’s ridiculous you know and you tell them that and they get upset but people just need to chill out... I’ve been sort of dating a guy recently funny enough, and he met, he

called my ad... sometimes you know you get some really great people who will as well just be so nice and say, 'hey you want to go grab dinner?' I mean sometimes outside of getting together with these people and engaging in the sexual act, it's almost as if you're just sort of like going out and hanging out with a person and having fun and getting paid for it (Bruce, Toronto).

Speaking about clients, another escort said, "I wouldn't go on a repeat with somebody if I didn't like them like as a person" (Eddy, Toronto). This same internet escort told a story about one client who he enjoyed his time with so much that eventually

I said to him at some point, 'OK don't give me anymore money. Like this is ridiculous, I'm you know, you're either my friend or I'm one of your staff...I don't want you thinking that I'm around you because of the money'...it doesn't get boring because I've developed a connection. And then with the new ones it doesn't get boring because you don't know what the fuck to expect (Eddy, Toronto).

These relations can involve elements of friendship, enjoyed for the sake of pleasure. The issues of mutuality and honesty in sex between men were narrated again and again as a reason friendships emerge: "I've become friends with a lot of my clients ...I can't lie, I can't just pretend so I can get money from them" (Roberto, New York).

Friendship is an intimacy that is engaged in simply for the pleasure it affords: "a friendship of the future that calls us to come to a space beyond (hetero)sexuality, a space in which friendship as a work of art can be received and preserved" (Garlick, 2002:571). The boundaries between working life and sex life are more porous and sometimes non-existent when it comes to the sex and work lives of male-for-male internet escorts. Arriving at a position of friendship undoes the distinction between escort and client, desexualizes the relation, and creates a situation for particularly queer intimacy.

Friendship entails creative relationships, since "otherwise it is not a friendship but an imprisonment of the self as self-same" (Manning, 2007:24). Male-for-male internet escorting can involve elements of friendship with clients in specific cases. Friendship between those

who were once escort and client shows that sex work in this context is not fundamentally about a staged sexual performance. It is about power, in the strategic and capillary sense Foucault means it. Sometimes these power relations are, if only for an evening, absolved of their necessity in favour of friendship as a way of life. Sex, then, may have very little to do with the ethical work required to subvert sexuality as a regime of categorization (Sawicki, 2004), although, as I have suggested here, such ethical relationships begin with and are extended through touching other bodies.

## **Conclusion**

I have argued that the sociology of sex work must recognize how diverse sexualities operate in male-for-male internet escorting. Comprehending sexuality in male sex work requires a different set of theoretical tools compared to other sectors of the commercial sex industry. The narratives of male-for-male internet escorts suggest that the sex of sex work greatly influences their so-called private sex lives. Some sought more kinks, while some sought more closeness. In both instances, sex lives were situationally linked to the kind of sex they were having at work, the market they played to as an escort. Sex work, therefore, cannot be separated from biography, as the two are connected through touch. 'Intimacy' has many meanings in these encounters between escort and client, from sexual intimacy to friendship. I have tried to undo the binary between 'real' and 'feigned' intimacy by pointing to its performative character. I have investigated how escorts make distinctions based on their own understandings of sexuality as well as the confessions of clients and how some escorts capitalize on these confessions.

There are two tendencies with male-for-male internet escorting encounters: a tendency towards the strategic deployment of sexuality and the use of ready-made tropes, as

well as a tendency towards the unanticipated, the aleatory, and friendship. Insofar as the encounter follows the tendency towards running alongside the deployment of sexuality, it does nothing to challenge the Oedipalization of sexuality and the centrality of the penis in sex. Insofar as the encounter follows the tendency towards friendship as a way of life, the relation can challenge and convulse conventional understandings of masculinity (Stephens, 1999), although this is not necessarily the intention. The open tendency in the encounter, let me clarify, is not an organized resistance against sexual categorization. It is more of a surprise, an aperture for composing new relations on a small scale.

Foucault was not operating at a level of analysis concerned with interaction. But his discussion of sexuality, confessions and friendship can be reconciled with interactionist sociology. It has been argued that Foucault is only useful for discussing discourse, knowledge, in abstraction, which ignores the specificities of sexuality and gender. Through engaging with the sex and work narratives of male-for-male internet escorts, I have shown that Foucault's writings can be brought to bear on the most touching encounters of our lives.

## **CHAPTER NINE – HOW BODIES MATTER IN MALE-FOR-MALE INTERNET ESCORTING: BODY WORK, BODY CAPITAL AND BODY TROUBLE**

There are two meanings of ‘touch’ running through this text. The first meaning refers to imbrications of bodies, and the second refers to mutuality and camaraderie. My contention is that the idea of ‘touching encounters’ highlights the role of interactionism in relations between escort and client, while pointing to how discourses of sexuality are translated by participants in joint actions. In this chapter, the dual meaning of touching encounters is explored through analysis of how escorts talk about and work on their bodies as well as the bodies of other men.

Wolkowitz (2002) blames the lack of concern for working bodies in social science on cultural feminist writings that emphasize constitution of the body by discourse. Post-structuralist theorists, Butler (1990) for instance, have been accused of positing the body as a form of text inscribed by discourse to the neglect of its materiality. Butler (2004a:198) herself admits this when she writes: “I am not a very good materialist. Every time I try to write about the body, the writing ends up being about language”. There are few humping and pumping bodies to be found even in the sociology of sexuality (Plummer, 2007). Ironically, scholarship concerning male sex work has not fully investigated issues of embodiment and corporeality. In this chapter, I focus on how male-for-male internet escorts talk about bodies as integral to the encounter between themselves and clients.

Discourses of sexuality and gender provide the parameters by which bodies are understood (Dozier, 2005). Yet sometimes discourse falters upon, and scripts are shaken off by, the moving body. The use of the body does not always need to be pinned to a sexed or gendered meaning. For instance, O’Connell Davidson (1995) discusses the way female sex workers will “milk” clients with their vaginas to bring the men to orgasm quicker. Female

respondents in Prus and Irini's (1980) study like men to be on top, because if clients move the way they want clients come quicker. Josh from Toronto similarly reports "I'm kinda like a power bottom, you just give into it for a minute and they're usually done. Lots of times I can make 300 bucks in fifteen minutes". This practice of being a 'power bottom' is about the materiality of the body, what it can do. To develop an embodied understanding of male-for-male internet escorting, sociologists must start with what bodies are capable of and not an abstract notion of discourse. An interactionist approach to the body is attuned to how bodies mean through movement in specific contexts (Jackson and Scott, 2001). Monaghan (2005) argues that "proponents of embodied sociology theorize from bodies as lived entities" (pg. 84). Likewise, in this chapter I start from the body work of escorts in theorizing the relationship between their work, their bodies and the bodies of other men.

This chapter unpacks three concepts –body work, body capital, and body trouble – as they concern male-for-male internet escorting, with a particular emphasis on how each of these concepts frames a discussion of touching. Body work refers to what we do with our bodies and the bodies of others. The literature on body work (Gimlin, 2007; Wolkowitz, 2006) examines how people work on/with other bodies and body fluids. When working bodies have been studied, it has been assumed that these bodies are heterosexual male bodies, so queer bodies and women's bodies at work have been neglected (Drummond, 2005; Oerton and Phoenix, 2001; Grosz, 1994). I argue that male-for-male internet escorting is a form of body work requiring body reflexive practices generated out of concern for and touching with other men's bodies. As an example of the touching of others that is involved in body work, consider Sam's narrative:

...with my body I have power. Because they so enjoy being with me they are ready to pay for it. This changed the way I think about my body and think about myself. They

realize that if they do not pay for it they will not get it ...many of the guests, they turn around at the end, and they say thank you, you are giving a real massage ...a guy told me that 'I am sore when I come here and I want the massage. The erotic part is good, but I am not taking the erotic part without the massage,' so he said 'you're good. The last guy I went to see he was giving a superficial rub, next five minutes he was all over my cock' (Sam, Ottawa).

Part of the work of these men is to touch others – they are professional touchers. Body work is not reducible to 'sex' or to 'work,' however, so my analysis supplements understandings of sex work by looking at its corporeal elements.

It has been argued that body work can be conceptualized as an accumulated and ossified form of "body capital" (Wacquant, 1995). Body capital refers to how what we do with our bodies becomes valued. While there are certain body stereotypes and racialized bodies valorized in male-for-male internet escorting, I argue the idea of body capital is only partially helpful for conceptualizing the way bodies are valued in escorting, since there is no pinnacle body all escorts or clients seek. Nor is there a strict regime of discipline or training for escorts. In addition, escorting can be oriented more towards caring about clients than competing against other escorts; compassion shared through bodies coming together is valued in ways the idea of body capital cannot account for.

Body trouble refers to how what we do with our bodies becomes problematized. Talking about escort bodies also means talking about HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections, not because male sex workers are disease vectors as the public health literature has assumed (see Morse et al., 1991), but because escorts are proactive in protecting their sexual health and educating clients about safe sex. In attempts to mitigate body trouble, male-for-male internet escorts negotiate health risks through their bodies, through touching, even with men who have HIV/AIDS or sexually transmitted infections.

This chapter is organized in four parts. First I consider male-for-male internet escorts' stories about their bodies in relation to the idea of body work. I then examine the idea of body capital and consider its usefulness for thinking about the touching encounters and embodiment of masculinities that escorting requires. Later in the chapter, I consider escort narratives pertaining to body trouble, sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS. In conclusion, I reassess what the ideas of body work, body capital and body trouble contribute to thinking through the corporeality of sex work.

### **Body Work**

The idea of 'work' often invokes a hard, male, and dirty body, the worker body under industrial capitalism such as the bodies of workers in factories or mines. Wolkowitz (2006) argues that bodies have been ignored in the sociology of work. Scholars have singled out the bodies of manual labourers instead of the bodies of other kinds of workers, including those who work on other bodies. Male-for-male internet escorts' bodies are central to their work, as are the bodies of clients. All the touching that happens during escort encounters can be conceptualized as body work.

Researchers have used the idea of "body work" to refer to work on one's own body, work on the bodies of others, the management of bodily gestures and the modification of bodies through working (Gimlin, 2007). Sometimes body work is dirty work, where less appealing parts of others' bodies are managed. Kang's (2003) research regarding work in nail salons is an example. Escorting can be conceptualized as body work since escorts work on their own bodies to attract clients and keep the clients they already have. Male escorts work on client bodies, manage clients' bodily fluids, and use their own bodies to provide pleasure.

As mentioned in Chapter Seven, these men provide a diversity of services to clients, so the kind of body work they do depends on the kinds of clients the escort aims to attract:

When someone is paying for something they want to have something good. When you go to the grocery store you do not want to buy rotten bananas. I have the power in this job. I have the power because my body is demanded... I have the body he is looking for, I make sure it stays that way. I do my push ups, I make sure I do my sit ups. I carry weights. I play tennis and I play badminton. I keep in shape so I have the body that people want to pay for (Sam, Ottawa).

With male-for-male internet escorts, it is not only the outside of the body that has to be kept looking good. Our bodies are more than semiotic surfaces. The inside of the body must be kept smelling and feeling aesthetically pleasing:

I always douche. Because if I am with a client who wants to fuck me I will douche at least three times and make sure I'm really clean. The clients do not want to have shit stains on their sheets or their dick. Like any good escort, you douche properly, you are clean, shaved, your balls are shaved, you trim where you are supposed to be, unless a client has requested a punk hustler look from the street, because some people like rough trade fantasies... I do not wear cologne. You should never wear cologne with a client. You do not know if they are married. If they have a girlfriend. You do not want your scent on the client. I learned that from female escorts who told me they do not wear perfume (Tyler, Ottawa).

...

I do have a douche thing if they need to use it. Most guys come over clean (Ricky, Toronto).

Do you ever recommend maybe take a minute and...?

Yeah, in both private and sex work. Like sometimes they'll, and sometimes it's not their fault, you're human. They think they're clean, they may have cleaned up an hour ago but something's moved down, and I, I don't give a shit, you're human, I'm human. We'll touch up, as we call it (Ricky, Toronto).

Senses of smell and touch are central in these narratives about what Tyler and Ricky do with their bodies and the bodies of others. Tyler mentions that the sight and smell of excrement is not appreciated by most clients, and so is preemptively removed. As mentioned in Chapter Seven, this kind of work can also be conceived of as "aesthetic labour" (Warhurst and

Nickson, 2008). The escort fashions their body depending on what kind of aesthetic the client is hoping for. As discussed in Chapter Eight, there are numerous stereotypes in queer communities that compel sexual performatives. Sometimes men attempt to embody these stereotypes (Monaghan, 2005). Embodiment of a 'rough trade' persona, as Tyler indicates, is an example. Finally, the smell of cologne can blow the cover of the client inadvertently. Body work implies more than just working on the surface appearance of one's body; it also implies management of one's odours and one's body fluids.

A sense of self is created through working on other bodies and reflexive management of one's own body (Crossley, 2006a). These body reflexive practices can involve all kinds of plucking, cutting, trimming, preening, waxing, pumping and shaving:

I shave my chest. I shave all of my upper body. I shave every part I don't want hair on it.... I didn't do it before, I used to trim my hair before, but I didn't take a lot of care on some parts. I didn't shave my chest before, I didn't shave my back and all of these kinds of things and now I do it (Frederico, Toronto).

All parts of the body are subject to these reflexive practices. The materiality of the escort's own body changes as they shape it towards certain ends: "[escorting] made me a lot more conscious of the way I look and I constantly prep myself up if there's something that I think is a flaw I'm going to find it and I'm going to obsess over it" (Gabe, Toronto). These reflexive stylizations of the body that happen over time are what Foucault (1988) calls technologies of the self. Technologies of the self allow individuals

to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality (1988:18).

This stylization of the body requires time and effort:

It's a pain in the ass sometimes getting ready to go and having to look good and be 'on'. That's the worst, the phone rings and it's 10 o'clock and I'm in my sweat pants

watching *Friends* and I don't feel like doing this or I just you know masturbated an hour ago or I'm hungry and feel fat, that's the hardest thing, is getting yourself together (Conrad, Toronto).

Such body reflexive practices are situated in larger networks of social relations (Connell, 2000:59). Instead of bodies being passive objects of symbolism and power, the concept of body reflexive practice is suggestive of how body subjects are at once constituents of governance and resistance. Such body work is socialized by the interpretive network one is situated in (Crossley, 2006b), which means body work is never simply a matter of idiosyncrasy. People work on themselves over time to meet the demands of gender and sexuality that are thrust upon them as part of their work (Cover, 2004b). Gill and colleagues (2005:58) argue "the body is a site not only for the performance or enactment of masculinity, but also for its profound and intimate regulation," such that body reflexive practices are pivotal in presentations of self during work.

Talk about sex tends to place all the emphasis on the genital zone of the body. Male-for-male internet escorting is not all about sex, and these excerpts describe how other parts of the body are subjected to body reflexive practices. Yet the penis does figure centrally in escort narratives about their touching encounters. At 64 years of age, after seeing hundreds of penises a year for over 20 years as an escort, one respondent mentioned that he has used "condoms on guys who I thought had ugly cocks" (Gerald, Toronto). Certain penises become 'ugly' in comparison to others and then are correspondingly touched (or not) as part of the work. In the words of Dollimore (2001:374) "there's a long tradition of people of the same – the very same – sexual orientation being disgusted with each other". However, disgust does not translate into intolerance in this case, partly because the escort is dependent on the client for income. Aesthetics matter for our level of engagement and excitement with others.

Escorts may charge more money if they are put off by the body of the client or are asked to do something with their body that is not preferred. Frank from Toronto states that the primary task involved in escorting for him is “learning to tolerate disgusting things”. As opposed to being the centre of all sex work, the penis is simply another body part to be managed. In this sense, the penis often fails and does not live up the tale of omnipotence (see Stephens, 2007).

As discussed in Chapter Seven, there is a before, during and after to escorting, and much of the work happens before escorts meet clients. This is the case with escort work on their own bodies. The escort has to reflexively work on his body before the encounter and also during the encounter, to make it serviceable. Part of this work on the body intersects with the use of supplements to enhance one’s sexual performance:

I’ve never taken Viagra in the context of sex trade work. I’ve used it recreationally with other sexual partners and I’ve had times in the context of sex trade work where I wished I had taken a Viagra because for whatever reason I’m not able to maintain a full enough erection for the client but the thing about Viagra is it takes an hour to kick in, you’re session is only an hour so if you get half an hour into your session and you realize you’re not getting it up, taking a Viagra doesn’t do any good because you’re not going to be hard until after the session is over...maybe as I get older it will become more important to me but I do always try to be as genuinely turned on by a client as possible (Claude, Montréal).

The escort needs to create some sense of arousal in the ‘here and now’ to make the sexual component of the encounter happen, which can involve taking various performance enhancing substances like Viagra. Potts (2004) argues Viagra operates to sexualize bodily relations, restoring penetrative sex to the centre of relations. Viagra aids the escorts in preparing and presenting the sexualized body. In the words of Frank from Toronto:

I take Viagra and Cyalis fairly regularly. If I know I am going to have several tricks in quick succession I will take a Cyalis, or if I have a client who is difficult to work with because he is hideous, I will take a Viagra or Cyalis. And I always make sure not to masturbate before so I can have an erection, because you are expected to have an erection and there is no way out of it. The other guy is paying a lot of money. There is only one guy with whom that is a problem because he is so spectacularly ugly. Every

time I see him I have this problem. I need to make sure that I do not masturbate for a couple days to get off. And I make sure to take Cyalis ahead of time to maintain an erection. The clients who want to get fucked, I need to be hard. There is another guy who is a very intense bottom and he wants to be fucked for hours, so we do two hours of the same thing, I have to be hard for hours, even after I come he wants me to keep going, so Cyalis is needed.

Some clients demand particular performances from the escort body. Because escorts need to fit a certain stereotype, and their bodies need to be prepped for performance in the encounter, escorts can become preoccupied with constantly trying to manage their bodies. Body reflexive practices lead to self-surveillance and supplementation of the facts of the body to meet the demands placed upon them as part of work.

However, it is important not to overstate the case about body regulation. Sex workers take their bodies as fields of social action, yes, but the process is negotiated. Bodies need to be made sense of (Jackson and Scott, 2007). Out of this sense making, sexual encounters can produce unanticipated meanings as well as new ways of using men's bodies. For example, body work can change the way escorts think of their bodies and the bodies of other men:

There's definitely guys that turn me on more than others for sure, but I'm way more open to a variety of body types and all that, ages, which also has opened me to women funny enough... One time I walked into a dark room and there's a guy on the bed with no arms and no legs and the money is there and he wants me to do this, and I just said, 'No' and I said, 'It's not because you have, you know, things for legs, but it's because you lied to me and it freaked me out'. The odd time if somebody is a little too old, it's not their age, but it reminds me of my father and it freaks me out. If they have, physical attributes or if they remind me of my dad, my dad and I never did anything, my dad is dead now, but it's just too weird (Conrad, Toronto).

...

I used to have issues with people if they were not in shape, I would feel like it's weird. I felt almost disgusted by touching them. Now I see people of all shapes. I can see their hearts. I see guys that are skinny, flabby or fat or chubby whatever, I mean I see, you know, the totality, the body is not that important anymore really for me. But I know how in the gay community that's not likely, gay people are very judgmental ...now I can have sex with anybody, pretty much (Roberto, New York).

Working on other men's bodies challenged Conrad's and Roberto's conventions concerning what bodies are acceptable as bodies to be near, and in a sense this is a challenge to the valorization of particular body types in the gay community. Here, there is a limited looping effect between the encounter and the escort's understandings of bodies and self. Hacking (2004) discusses the looping that occurs between classifications, peoples' reception of the classification, and the concomitant redrawing of the classification. It is not only the materiality of the escort body that changes because of the work; the meanings of men's bodies can also change such that escorts will be more or less accepting of different body shapes and sizes:

Having to give a massage to a 90-year-old man that's 400 lbs yeah, you know ...I'm going to go to the gym for the rest of my life. I had a guy in a wheel chair, a hot guy too. He was really built from here up, he was stabbed in the back in high school and so he lost all the feeling in his legs. I had never been naked with a guy in a wheelchair before. And you know what it wasn't bad. I've had a lot of different experiences and seen a lot of body types now. I would say it just makes me see what I don't want for myself. They might be perfectly content, but I don't want to be 300 lbs when I'm 60 years old (Steve, Toronto).

There is a looping effect where the escort's body reflexive practices are shaped in relation to bodies he encounters during work. Hacking (2004) suggests his idea of looping at the general level of discourse works precisely because it has its analogue at the level of interaction. The consequence is that the body is not a fixed object. The body and the meaning we attribute to it is fluid (Linder, 2001). Touching the bodies of other men has unanticipated consequences for how escorts attribute meaning to their own and other bodies.

As discussed in Chapter Eight, some scholars have claimed that sex workers create a firm distinction between their work life and personal life. This distinction is hard to maintain with male-for-male internet escorts insofar as their sex work and their sexual biographies

overlap.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, the body work of escorting work builds up in a set of habits influencing the daily life of the escort:

When I am preparing before a client, I am turning the lights down, turning a porno on, getting the lube ready, on a normal date you would not do this but escorts find themselves doing this stuff, I do it. For instance, the idea of washing down. Escorts wash down before they see a client. But when you are escorting for two or three years, it becomes a part of you, you find yourself worried about washing down before a date (Ben, London).

Escorts cannot separate their work sex from their sex life. The habits of their work sex life can reflexively become the habits of their whole sex life, demonstrating again how sex work and biography overlap for these men. Sex work cannot be separated from the biography of the escort since the bodies of workers and clients become entwined. The touch of body work can collapse the categories of professional and private spheres.

The encounters between escort and client are touching encounters, based on bodies coming together and engagement of the senses. These encounters are also 'touching' in a second way. The imbrications of client and escort bodies can be tender and poignant:

There was one guy who would come to see me, spoke to him on the phone, I thought he was young, in college, early twenties. You get a mental picture. He arrived, he was the ugliest human being I have ever seen, hook nose, humpback, covered in hair. But very sweet, appreciative, probably never had sex before, it was all over quickly, then he held me, I let him stay the whole time. I felt that someone like that very rarely is touched, never has a chance for human contact, it was all about holding another human, that was a satisfying experience. We never think about people like that. We take for granted being touched. It is sad. I felt sorry for him (Oscar, London).

Oscar's narrative is an example of the sort of mutuality that can be characteristic of sex between men (see Allman, 1999) that extends into the commercial encounter. More than a simple display of affection, this kind of touching by the escort is a social validation for the

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<sup>30</sup> I have argued that men who have sex with men socialize over anonymous sex, and for this reason there is a specific logic of the lure with male-for-male internet escorting that can lend itself to creation of friendships and relationships beyond the one-off touching encounter. This might be true too for some female and trans workers, especially the later who identify as men. Suffice it to say that generalizing to the female and trans sectors of the commercial sex industry is not my purpose.

client. In a similar example, Jeff from New York met a client who had lost both legs to diabetes at age twelve. The client stated he never was able to meet men for companionship because of the look of his body. Jeff commented that “it is sad that people, not just gay men, are so childish about the human body”. Men who have sex with men sometimes live their lives in lonely silence because of stigmatization (Ward, 2008). This lonely silence can be amplified for men who cannot match up to stereotypical body images. Many clients of male sex workers are unable to engage in sexual encounters outside of this context because of the ways their bodies or faces look (Gagnon and Simon, 1974). Touching encounters provide contact with other men who may otherwise remain untouched.

To reinforce the dual meaning of touching encounter, consider the increasing confluence of disability rights and sex worker advocates. Disability rights advocates argue touch is highly remedial, as do sex worker groups. The Tender Loving Care Trust<sup>31</sup> in the United Kingdom and the Touching Base Collective<sup>32</sup> in New South Wales Australia both endeavour to facilitate links between persons with disabilities, their advocacy groups and the commercial sex industry. While not all escorts think of their work as providing affection and the poignancy of touch, some do, and some of the escorts whose stories appear in this text are a part of the Tender Loving Care Trust.

Sociologists are not used to thinking of the work that people do on their own bodies and on the bodies of others as difficult or important or even ‘real’ work (Wolkowitz, 2006). The way body work is carried out, the way that touching becomes the basis of the encounter, is influenced by the bodies that are sought after by clients and how escorts stylize their bodies. Over time, the work that escorts do on client bodies and the bodies of escorts

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<sup>31</sup> To visit the Tender Loving Care Trust website, see: [www.tlc-trust.org.uk](http://www.tlc-trust.org.uk)

<sup>32</sup> To visit the Touching Base Collective website, see: [www.touchingbase.org](http://www.touchingbase.org)

themselves can become more valued. Crossley (2005:9) discusses body reflexive practices that “modify, maintain or thematize” the body. The stylization of the body that escorts engage in to lure customers can be conceptualized as a body reflexive practice (Crossley, 2006b), as it is work done on the body according to the unwritten requisites of an interpretive network that fosters particular styles and forms of the male figure.

Touch is central to body work, since it involves the worker touching themselves or others. But male-for-male internet escorts are not only doing this work on themselves and others for fun – they get paid. How, then, should sociologists conceptualize the value of the escort body and the body work they conduct in escorting encounters?

### **Body Capital**

There is an alluring concept in the sociology of the body literature: body capital. The body capital concept is attractive because it draws together a conceptualization of the body with a conceptualization of economy. The body capital concept has become prevalently used to explain how bodies are valued and judged in consumer and competitive contexts.

Wacquant (1995) describes body capital as an abstract form of accumulated body work that is developed concretely through some set of bodily practices. The body is conceptualized as both the means of production and that which is produced. Since capital by its very nature accumulates, the “body is capable of producing more value than was ‘sunk’ into it” (pg. 67). Judgments of body capital refer to specific body parts that are integral to the involved bodily practices and parts (e.g. the penis and ass). For instance, whether the escort penis is circumcised matters for the kinds of clientele that will be attracted (cut or uncut foreskin is the first item listed on most escort websites).

Like body work, body capital involves work on and with bodies. The difference between the two concepts, however, is the claim that body capital can be accumulated and ossified (Wacquant, 1995). This accumulation and ossification is the result of training and discipline. Training regimes vary depending on the bodily practice it is designed to facilitate. Body capital cannot simply be equated with the boxing example Wacquant provides. Yet there are interesting parallels between boxers and escorts. According to Wacquant (1995), male boxers often refrain from sexual intercourse for weeks before a fight. Escorts also must manage their sexual output and refrain from ejaculating in preparation for the encounter:

Most of the times with clients I do not ejaculate. That is extra. For sure. That is extra. That is the highest. That and anal is the highest. Because if I ejaculate and have an orgasm, what if I got a call and I cannot do nothing. That ruins the next call (Harvey, Montréal).

Escorts must reflexively manage their body fluids as part of their work. Nevertheless, I argue that these body reflexive practices do not necessarily end up in an ossified and transferable form of body capital.

For Wacquant (2004), the body has somatic potentialities that can be capitalized on. For the boxer, these potentialities are the strengths and weaknesses of their anatomy. For the escort, these are penis size and build, skin colour, muscularity, et cetera. The body capital concept assumes that there is a build up of body work that materializes in a body when it performs optimally. With an activity like boxing, the efficient and lean body is the body that all boxers aim for, whereas with escorting there is a multiplicity of bodies. Some clients are 'size queens,' preferring and seeking out men with 'larger than average' sized penises. Each escort body can potentially be valorized depending on what the client is looking for:

I used to think you needed to be the all American or all Canadian boy next door with the abs and the pecs and the tan to be a successful male escort. A flawless body. Guess what? After reviewing all the escorts who advertise on the site and on other

sites, escorts come in all shapes and sizes. They are not all muscular. Some of the most popular ones on page one of my site are twinkles, not muscular. I do not feel great about my body, I know I should work out and try to look a little bit better, but I have been told that my body looks great, and I have a natural physique, I am not overweight, I have a few curves. I have never had a client say from the site or otherwise that 'you know what, you are so not what I wanted' (Tyler, Ottawa).

There is no pinnacle body with internet escorting, and so there is no one stylized body that accrue of body work could aim towards. When Wacquant (2004) discusses accrue of body capital he means it almost literally, since the trick is to build body capital without burning it up through training and performing. The goal is to peak with body capital during the performance to maximize attainment of symbolic capital, which then converts body capital into economic capital. With internet escorting, however, the proliferating sexual mosaic discussed in Chapter Eight makes it so that there is no one pinnacle body that is honoured across the industry. There are multiple valorized bodies for each different market.

As discussed in Chapter Seven, computer work is part of the labour process of male-for-male internet escorting. While part of escorting requires the mingling of bodies, the seemingly disembodied way that escorts recruit clients is through online sites. While escorts once attracted clients through print ads and phonebooks, a majority of escorts advertise on specialty sites dedicated to male-for-male commercial sex (Pruitt, 2005). I analyze this computer work as part of body work, not in terms of fantasy. Psychoanalytic accounts of fantasy disembody the subject (Jackson and Scott, 2007). I am more interested in the physical effort that goes into touching and being touched by a client. Online communication regarding bodies is oriented towards generating a corporeal encounter.

Most of the correspondence that occurs between escort and client before the encounter is about the escort body. Although there is a stereotype that all men who have sex with men spend most of their days in the gym pumping up (see Brown and Graham, 2008),

escorts spend almost as much time on computers as office workers, challenging the association of computers with 'nerdy' bodies (Lupton, 1995). The escort's virtual body must match up with the encountered body or else the client will be suspicious. Clients contact escorts on specialty websites, and select escorts based on pictures posted at these sites:

Anybody I am online with, say in a chat room, where I advertise my stats and I have a few pictures, where my face is not showing, it is basically my ass or my cock. Or a part of my body from my neck to my torso. I am not wanting to show my face. People message me and ask for a face pic. I say no...there are half a dozen on a nightly basis. None of them show a picture of their face, just the body (Tyler, Ottawa).

In escorting, the body initially becomes known through online pictures. What this means is that semiotic display of the body in picture form is the first moment of valorization and translation of body capital. The materiality of offline bodies relates to the virtuality of the online body insofar as clients will be dissatisfied with escorts if there is not a tight fit between the image offered in the profile and the body that shows up for the encounter. Some websites demand a face picture, whereas on other websites and in other cities it is customary only to show pictures of the penis and ass. Certain particularities of the body can matter and attract a certain clientele: "the hairless chest is the biggest thing, that's like the huge demand is the lack of body hair... I didn't have a photo for years and it really hurt the amount of business that I got" (Bob, Ottawa). Even when men who have sex with men do chat online, the chatting is about the measurements of the body (Jones, 2005). These online text-based performances of gender and sexuality remain strongly connected to the actual body of the escort. There are possibilities for challenging gender and sexuality stereotypes with online performances, although van Doorn and colleagues (2008) argue this is less often the case.

Online pictures are not oriented towards one ideal type body that could be said to represent the pinnacle of body capital for male escorts. There are multiple ideal body types

and these influence the way escorts stylize their bodies, groom, pluck, shave and wax: “if I stopped doing sex trade work tomorrow, I wouldn’t stop going to the gym because I still want to get laid outside of doing that so I want my body to be attractive to a wide variety of people” (Claude, Montréal). Body stereotypes can influence their escorting work, but again, the body work is not oriented towards one single ideal form and is highly contingent on what the clients wants.

An assumption that Wacquant’s (1995) concept of body capital implies is that the body worker needs to build up capital through convoluted and repetitive episodes of training. If body capital can be used to conceptualize male-for-male escorting, it needs to be stated that the bodies being produced are far less disciplined. Examples of this relate to hair fetishes that clients sometimes have. Hairy men, or ‘bears,’ represent a highly valorized subtype of queer masculinity in some cities and age groups (see Hennen, 2008; Monaghan, 2005). Some of the escorts accentuate these features of their bodies to attract clients:

...there are not a lot of hairy guys in the industry and I’m sure that of course they don’t call only me, I get sort of like people that like a certain type because they like hairy. People that like hairy they definitely call me eventually, I have a little niche. And plus the fact that I’m Latin and I’m uncut, some people they like that (Roberto, New York).

Roberto describes the features of his body that he reflexively accentuates; yet this is not the same as disciplining the body in order to achieve a pinnacle of body capital. The growth of hair is the opposite of dutiful discipline. The same features of this body may or may not be useful, not attractive to any other client, and so is not ‘body capital’ insofar as whatever body the escort has produced through body work is relevant only to a specific niche market and not to all potential clients.

Recall from Chapter Six that as an escort ages and puts on weight, they must position and advertise their bodies differently. Just as hair can be a sought after bodily feature for men who like sex with men, an aged body can also be sought after in the form of the 'daddy figure': "I'm absolutely not an Arnold Schwarzenegger but you cannot become totally obese, especially for a daddy figure. A little weight is OK but you need to keep it within limits" (Donald, New York). The daddy figure can be hirsute, challenging the idea that the escort must be taut, young, and stereotypically sexy. The daddy figure is a valorized age-graded sexuality in male-for-male internet escorting. There are body reflexive practices in male-for-male internet escorting, which requires self-surveillance, but there is no pinnacle body. Nor does all the body work happen on the self or for the self, as with the body capital concept. In escorting, much of the body work is oriented towards other, which makes the valuing of bodies more complicated.

There are multiple valorized body types in male-for-male internet escorting, but this multiplicity is not infinite and some bodies are much more valorized for particular characteristics. For instance, escort bodies are valorized in terms of their racialized status. Should the racialized body be conceptualized as a form of 'body capital'? Some clients are not looking for a certain kind of sexual favour but are wishing to touch a body that is different than their own:

People ask how can I have such a good body for my age, they touch me, and they say things like 'what a gorgeous butt'. You feel a lot of respect from those people, which gives you another look at your own body. I feel younger. I feel I can still do it. Maybe there is some curiosity too. People look and say he is black, I want to see a black, I want to touch a black. My difference is my advantage (Sam, Ottawa).

Sexuality intersects with racialization. Sometimes the desire for an exotized, coloured body can reinforce pre-existing inequalities, though we should not presume what those inequalities

are in advance (Escoffier, 2007; Wise, 2001; Dollimore, 1997). Some of the escorts identified as black, Latino and Lebanese. Green (2005) argues these skin colour and ethnic status characteristics are subtle yet at the same time influential in separating some men who have sex with men from others and in making it harder for some men to feel a sense of belonging. As Gamson and Moon (2004) indicate, queer theory has touched on issues of ethnicity but has tended to focus more on sexuality instead of the specificity of differences.

The work narratives of these men sometimes include talk about the way clients value their skin differently because of the colour of it, or value other parts of their body differently because of its exoticism. Sam from Ottawa, told a story about how clients valourized his penis more because of the colour of his skin:

They always ask, how big is it. I do not like to answer this question. I tell them what the rates are and what they get. But then they say again, how big is it. I won't tell them. I say take what you get, and don't come if you do not like it... it is stuff like 'I would love to be massaged by a black, how big is it,' and what is funny is ...my youngest guest who came last week is 26, he said how big is your cock, and I said I am naked, I am going to turn you around at the end and you are going to see it [laughing]. You better play with it when I am giving you an orgasm. That was cute...but whites also ask whites how big is it, it is an obsession amongst gays basically. As a black, when I get that question, it has another connotation.

Male-for-male internet escort encounters can be something like a quest for authenticity for the clients, both in terms of locating a desired ethnic type but also for having achieved gay identity (Padilla, 2007). Some authors have pointed out that gay men from Afro-Caribbean countries in Canada and the United States must keep secrets concerning sexuality from their ethnic community (see Green, 2007b; Crichlow, 2004). For these men, 'the village' is the only place to feel accepted concerning sexuality at the same time that these spaces are "often, though not always, white dominated" (Green, 2007b:770).

Skin colour is often associated with some stereotype about sexual performance. While blackness is associated with large penis size, the stereotype with Latino men is that they are amorous, and also, sometimes, hirsute:

When I moved to New York everybody was shaved. I don't mean to say I started a trend but I, maybe I had. I went to Brazil in '91 and I met this guy in New York before going and he's like, 'Why do you need to shave?' And I was like, 'When I was younger I wanted to be like everybody else.' and he said, 'No man, let it grow, it's much hotter'. So I started letting it grow. And I really liked it because I started getting more attention from the guys that I liked... That's how I met my lover... when I came back from Brazil, I came back hairy and he noticed me... since then little by little I started seeing... a lot more people that are hairy and sexier but in New York when I was here everybody shaved. I remember I went to the club with the hairy chest and everybody was surprised and my friends were all against it, 'Oh why don't you shave, shave it.' I said, 'Fuck you.' And they saw me with the hot guys later... I think the taste now really is the more mature looking (Roberto, New York).

Skin colour can be exoticized in male-for-male internet escorting, with corresponding assumptions about penis size, shape, the smell of the body, and the colour of hair. Whiteness is also valorized in this work. Jeff from New York is an escort who had served time in the military and positioned himself online as offering a WASP masculinity to clients. White, Anglo-Saxon, protestant (WASP) masculinity refers to an emotionless, macho whiteness, which is popular amongst Latino and black clientele. Jeff's profile pictures present a tough and intimidating figure as part of the sexual persona he is trying to build up, which is a particular marketing technique. In certain American cities, 'tops' and 'bottoms' "bear racial connotations whose significance may be exploited to heighten a sense of transgressiveness" (Dean, 2009:41). Whiteness is included in this array of racialized and valorized bodies. Skin colour is something that escorts accentuate in their advertising, play on during the encounter, and so it is performative along with sexuality.

I have argued the concept of 'body capital' is only partially helpful for thinking through how bodies matter in male-for-male internet escorting because 'body capital' tends

towards a pinnacle formation of the body that is transferable between contexts. As we have already heard with various escort narratives, a hard, hot body is not a necessity in escorting – it depends on how one positions themselves on the sexual mosaic. Not all escort bodies must or even can assimilate to stereotypes concerning attractiveness. Yet these stereotypes do exist, especially as it regards racialized bodies. Sam’s narrative suggests escorts can also try to dispel the stereotypes associated with their bodies.

### **Body Trouble**

It is difficult to transition into a discussion of HIV/AIDS because of the trauma it has exacted on the lives of many people, men who have sex with men in particular. HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections are related to the body because these are transferred through bodies coming together. The idea of body trouble alludes to the fact that bodies can be problematized by public health agencies (O’Byrne and Holmes, 2009), the law or even our sexual partners. Bodies can be problematized and regulated if they are designated as unruly by organizations with different ideas about what our bodies should be doing. Men who engage in non-monogamous sex or unsafe sex can be stigmatized as “dangerous queers” (see Smith, 1997). For this reason, very few escorts disclose their status as an escort to public health officials or even their general practitioners. One escort describes a conversation he had with a doctor that caused him to reflect on his father’s sexual practices in relation to his own:

...he asks ‘Oh, how many?’ and I’m like I don’t know a hundred just this year... but at the same time when you have someone like my father that will sleep with two or three women in a year but won’t wear any condoms, will go see a prostitute ...who is more dangerous? I want the public system to exist for everyone and to have any sex worker that are doing thousands of clients a year to still have a doctor that won’t get out the red marker and say like, ‘Oh, shit. Maybe you should stop’. And thinking like you’re just a disease (Jacques, Montréal).

It is exactly the bodies and fluids of escorts that public health researchers focus on in claiming that escorts are sexually compulsive and risky humans, since HIV/AIDS is linked to pollution, contagion and blame (see Lupton et al., 1995a). Some escorts face stigma because male-with-male sex and non-monogamy are associated with disease.

Stories about HIV/AIDS and health do not figure centrally in male-for-male escorts' talk about work or sexuality. This lack of stories about HIV/AIDS from these men may be because of certain medical advancements in HIV/AIDS treatment, or it may be because few of the escorts had any contact with outreach agencies or even public health agencies beyond tests for sexually transmitted infections (STIs). The primary concern of public health agencies in relation to men who have sex with men today is 'barebacking'. The literature on barebacking tries to comprehend why gay men continue to have sex without condoms despite HIV/AIDS. Whereas men who have sex with men were pioneers in establishing condom culture, today many men engage in anonymous sex without a condom, and even purposeful HIV transmission. It is argued that some men who have sex with men engage in risky behaviour because they associate riskiness with some subversive thrill and transgression (see Martin, 2006; Davis, 2002; Suarez and Miller, 2001). A whole new lingo has also evolved around barebacking. Doing it raw, sharing fluids, it is argued, can be viewed as a 'more real' by men who have sex with men (Kippax and Smith, 2001). Minichiello and colleagues (2008) suggest more and more male escorts are barebacking.

Rather than demonizing men who enjoy sex with men without a condom, Dean (2009) argues that "uncloseting HIV" requires an in-depth analysis of bodily contact "organized around the giving and receiving of semen" (pg. 10). Barebacking is what Dean calls "antihomonormative" sex (pg. 9), which is all too often characterized as "extreme

acting out or freakish behavior” rather than “sociability or intimacy” (pg. 20). In this section I am not trying to endorse one form of sex as more ethical than others, but instead aim to understand how sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS are made sense of and factor into the touching encounters of men who sell sex.

Public health officers rarely understand how sexual health is negotiated through touching and sensing during the encounter. Public health agencies also fail to recognize that men who have sex with men do not always or often think of anal sex, even anal sex without a condom, in terms of risk prevention (Gastaldo et al., 2009; Holmes and Warner, 2005). As Frank from Toronto puts it:

Safe sex is not as safe as it is made out to be...any time I try to research information about sexual health I get a party line. Useless advice. I tried on the internet to read about sexual health and basically it says, do not do it. Useless advice. Talk about it with your partner. As if people who have sex anonymously, like with an escort, are going to talk about it. Not realistic. Do not sleep around. Avoid anal sex. Who do they think they are talking to?

HIV/AIDS prevention projects impose a public health party line on men who have sex with men and may facilitate so-called risky health practices in unanticipated ways (also see Ridge, 2004; Crossley, 2002; Dowsett, 1996). What I am arguing is that there is a gap between public health discourses and the practice of sexual health during encounters.

How does what male-for-male internet escorts say about their work compare to public health claims about barebacking? Ideas concerning prevention of body trouble feature prominently in these understandings of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections: “you only have one body and you want to protect it, you want to be careful with your body” (Sam, Ottawa). Byron from Houston reiterates that “if someone wants to touch me in a way that puts me at risk I will tell them no. I will tell them later, or get out of it, keep myself safe”.

Almost all of the escorts suggest they practice safe sex during work: “I always sleep with everybody as though they have HIV” (Steve, Toronto). Conrad from Toronto reiterates:

I assume everyone is positive. I would say the doctor knows more about how to take care of the disease than the patient so if you’re accusing me because I’m a hooker than you don’t know, we are the ones that worry about it and think about it. I think it was probably in the 1980s the last time I had consciously unsafe unprotected sex. I had a condom break one time like ten years ago, which scared the hell out of me.

Sex is biographical. It follows that men who did not live through the 1980s, who did not see their friends dying, may not have the same kind of visceral defensive response to HIV/AIDS. For these men, talk about HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections is related to their age and biography:

I’m at an age where I caught the AIDS scare from 1983 on so condoms have been part of my life all my life. I don’t ever fuck without them with clients. I occasionally do in my private life as a top only and that’s what I call an educated risk that I’m taking...occasionally with guys I know and trust, I’ve looked at their ass if they’re bleeding or not I’ll occasionally bareback but with clients never. What happened one night though, I was with a client and we had used a condom to fuck, he was blowing me and I looked down and my dick is covered in blood. He had dental work that day. I looked down and said, ‘Is it me? Did you pull my dick? Is it you?’ ‘Shit, I had dental work done today.’ And my dick is covered in blood. You try all you can to be safe, and then shit still happens (Ricky, Toronto).

For Ricky, having unprotected sex as a top with someone he trusts is treated as an educated risk, but he would not bareback with clients for fear of HIV/AIDS. Yet as Ricky suggests, bodies are unruly and can exceed our capacity to control them. Escorts who have grown up without their friends dying from HIV/AIDS have a different outlook:

It’s a disease that doesn’t kill you anymore, it’s just a disease of the pain in the ass. I also don’t go down on a guy without looking at it and feeling it first... you’re obviously not going to cut it when it’s in there, and you know when you have a cut in your mouth because you feel it. Anal sex, absolutely 100% yes I wear a condom. I don’t know where he’s been and I don’t know where I’ve been (Eddy, Toronto).

The numerous understandings of body fluids and body parts these men have in relation to HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections are shaped through touching the bodies of

other men. In sum, these men report engaging in serosorting, “the tendency to pursue unprotected sex only with those who share one’s HIV status” (Dean, 2009:12). Negotiating sexual risks in this way is a “supremely safe version of barebacking,” which Dean argues “hardly qualifies as barebacking at all” (pg. 15).

It takes at least two bodies to make a touching encounter, and clients also play an important part in moving the interactions one way or another. Often escorts do not police their bodies or the bodies of clients because clients are often so afraid of disease that they ensure safe sex themselves:

Most guys I find are really protective of themselves mostly because they think you’re a diseased whore... if you’re fucking in the doggie style position, they’re forward and you’re behind they’ll spend the whole time being fucked looking back to make sure you haven’t slipped the condom off, as if...I had one guy he wouldn’t even let me blow him without a condom because he had a fear of getting something. I talked him into it because I didn’t want to blow him with a condom on but he wouldn’t blow me. He needed condoms. He should have come over in a body bag frankly, with some holes cut out (Ricky, Toronto).

These examples show how escorts negotiate the prominent sexual script of ‘risky sex’. Risk is negotiated not in an abstract or calculative way but more through the sensing and touching that occurs during the encounter. Safe sex is not achieved through strict and calculative adherence to public health discourse, but by meandering through what makes sense to do in an encounter. Phua and colleagues (2009) found that only a quarter of online escorts mention safe sex in their advertisements, taking this as an indication of how these men think of safe sex. However, I have argued that sexual health is negotiated during the touching encounter. Touching here is a strategy for getting to know the sexual health of others, feeling it out. Compared to claims in the public health literature concerning barebacking, male-for-male internet escorts do not seek transcendence through unsafe sex, partly because they want to continue on with their work and partly because they are well educated about HIV/AIDS.

Consider the irony of promoting safe sex by advocating the termination of touch. Condom culture is not fostered by a clinical, no-fun approach. Safe sex is hands on.

Touching encounters refer to the mingling of bodies, but also to the caring and camaraderie that exists between men who have sex with men. Living with HIV/AIDS can be desolate because “the ageing or diseased body is considered non-sexual, a horror of degeneration” (Lupton et al., 1995b:105). Disclosing status almost automatically leads to rejection in the dating scene. Some escorts refuse the pervasive fear of HIV/AIDS and, in a sense, break the touching barrier. This next escort talks about the way being with a man who has HIV is remedial and caring:

There was one of the clients that I used to see regularly, he was an HIV patient. All he wanted to do is cuddle with someone and have that human touch. Because he was pretty emaciated, he was pretty sick. I think he passed away now actually, but he used to just have me come over, I would put my arms around him and watch a movie and that’s all that he wanted was that, that human touch. Unfortunately a lot of people like that are kind of forgotten about and cast aside...I don’t think he had a lot of people visiting. It is rewarding, like healers...my friends used to joke, I’m the healing hooker (Steve, Toronto).

Beyond working as healers, sex workers sometimes act as sex educators in the ways they educate clients about safe sex practices (see Smith and Seal, 2008; Browne and Minichiello, 1995). Escorts report that safe sex is harder to practice in personal relationships compared to work sex, because condoms can always be introduced into the encounter as a matter of the labour process. The next escort agrees that escorting sex is safer than dating sex:

...some of the safer sex, or HIV prevention materials assume that if you engage in sex for money than you’re going to be engaging more dangerous behaviour but I found that it resulted in much more safe behaviour because the clients were nervous and didn’t want to catch anything and I certainly do not want to catch anything from them. So it sort of reversed the stereotype (Donald, New York).

The escorts I spoke with do not fit with the picture of risky sex advanced by public health agencies. To the contrary, the narratives escorts shared concerning HIV/AIDS and sexually

transmitted infections suggest they organize the touching of bodies in the encounter, and can orient this touching towards safer forms of sex without relinquishing attention to play and pleasure. Jake from London argues that starting to escort at the same time he entered into a serious relationship changed the way he practiced sex:

Americans are very safety conscious. I was going to whack someone off and I was going to spit on it to lube it up and he would not have it. No spit. I do not use condoms with my partner. I use condoms in every other situation, which makes it easier, it is not just my own safety, but now it is someone's safety I must account for, so that makes it simple.

Prior to the HIV/AIDS panic, male sex work was understood as a criminal matter. In the late 1980s, male sex workers became objects of epidemiology and in addition to being criminalized were said to be “reservoirs of disease and transmitters of infection from the gay population” (Scott, 2003: 194). Public health discourses have characterized men who have sex with men as “irrational, dangerous citizens” (Gastaldo et al., 2009:413). There is always fear that the next health epidemic will start in the shorts of these men. However, the narratives of escorts I spoke with suggest that escorts who advertise as professionals on specialty sites are not often involved in barebacking and do practice safe sex – when they are engaging in raw sex this is the result of high trust levels with the client and a negotiation of sexual scripts concerning ‘risky sex’. Male-for-male internet escorts negotiate health risks through touching and sensing in encounters, and they do this even with other men who have HIV/AIDS or sexually transmitted infections in a way that demonstrates that these touching encounters between client and escort can have a caring or empathetic orientation.

### **How Bodies Matter in Male-for-male Internet Escorting**

Male bodies that aim to be near other male bodies have not been given their due in the sociology of the body or the sociology of sex work. It has been argued that men having

sex with men undergo pressures imposed on them similar to women regarding body image, slimness and youthfulness. While it is vital to give specificity to homoerotic bodies, another concern is how far the homogeneity of these bodies can be assumed. What can be held constant about queer bodies besides a set of sexual ins and outs that differ from heterosexual repertoires on the surface of it? It is essentialist to assume that the bodies of men who have sex with men have a lot in common, just as it is essentialist to assume as Warner (1993:xxi) does that all the sex of “het culture” is the same. The bodies of men who have sex with men and their sex practices are rendered homogeneous in the deployment of a hetero versus homo binary (Dowsett et al., 2008). There are differences among gay men organized along class, age and ethnic lines (Ridge, 2004), and these are embodied differences that matter in sexual encounters. Butler (1993:240) argues “the thought of sexual difference within homosexuality has yet to be theorized in its complexity”. By demonstrating how facts of the body matter in the touching encounters of male-for-male internet escorts, I hope to have contributed to this project Butler calls for.

Wolkowitz (2006) argues that scholars have tended to offer only a caricature of the sex worker body. Considering the specificity of how bodies matter in male-for-male internet escorting allows for an understanding of the way divisions and differences between men who have sex with men operate through touching and being touched. The literature regarding body work describes how the work people do with their bodies or on other bodies can be the central activity of some work. The literature concerning body capital, however, assumes there is a pinnacle body that must be achieved for success in the field. What we see with male-for-male internet escorting is that all body sizes and specificities can be valorized depending on the encounter with the client. Finally, body trouble concerning HIV/AIDS and

sexually transmitted infections appeared in escort stories about their body work. The position of these men in the labour process vis-à-vis clients allows them to orient touching towards safe sex. Public health agencies assume men involved in commercial sex spread body troubles far and wide. Escorts repudiate this argument in their work narratives and practices.

Dowsett (2000) asks why scholars focus on identity categories and discourses of gay liberation instead of the way people touch one another as a basis for understanding sexuality, which is a relevant observation I have explored in this text. The men I interviewed engage in commercial sex and non-commercial sex marked by an itinerant way of coming together that differs from monogamous, pro-creative scripts of sex. Male-with-male sex, even commercial sex, is often based on a “meandering through” (pg. 33) rather than a set of scripted rules. Body-based practices thus must become central to scholarly understandings of sex work.

Sexual encounters are productive and creative, they are not only inscribed by discourse. How male escorts think of the sex of their work and position their work in relation to other work, as well as the way they think of their bodies and other bodies, is mediated by the touching of encounters. Discourses of sexuality and gender do not fully inscribe bodies before these bodies meet, as if a role is waiting for them to inhabit. I argue instead that touching encounters are a constructive relation: touching encounters produce new meanings and produce new ways for bodies to be together.

## CHAPTER TEN - CONCLUSION

I began this text with a short story Conrad had written about his work. His client, a soldier, paid to kill, could only feel alive and well again through being touched by the escort. Both Conrad and the client had everything to lose if the story got out – they could end up stigmatized or in jail. I begin the end of this text with another piece written by an escort. It is partially a story about what happens when the work these men do is publicly devalourized. In 1995, Gerald Hannon was released from Ryerson University and his job as a contract journalism instructor when it became known he sold sex to men. During our interview, Gerald said there “was sensation in the papers with much mockery and nasty calls ...people yelled at me in the street, it was bad for a while”. The union eventually won a settlement for Gerald, meaning that there was some recognition of discrimination at the institutional level. Gerald now manages his relations strategically: “mostly I do not feel stigmatized, but I only hang around with people who knew me before or got to know me because of this...[the University incident] is not something I would want to go through again”. Still, Gerald still feels his work is important. Here is his story:

This is what I am: 49 years old (though I'll claim 38 if there are dimmer switches), with a plain face that can look alternately dopey and intelligent. I have a better body than most 49-year-olds, though it is far from magazine material. It's quite a hairy body - a real turn-on for many men - though I shave my shoulders, back and balls in the belief that the overall look is more pleasing. I have a great ass and a small-ish cock. Excellent social skills - I know how to make men feel comfortable from the moment they arrive. I take pride in my work. I think a lot about what I do, and try to do a good job. I'm also a frequently published journalist who has won two National Magazine Awards. I feel part of a new social phenomenon: whores with attitude, men and women who choose this profession, men and women who have perfected that most ingratiating of personality traits - shamelessness. But it is a shamelessness untarnished by insolence, by the bravado of those who suspect they are in fact quite as trashy as everyone thinks they are. It is a sunny shamelessness. I think you'll like it. I think you'll like us. Enough about me (for just a moment). A bit about you. You're fascinated by whores. You see us along the streets at night, wide awake, authoritative, lithe. You imagine

we know everything there is to know about dark and the city. You see our ads and find something funny about their calculated lubriciousness. You've been to the movies so you know our lives are a little empty, a little sad, a little loveless.

We have hearts of gold sometimes - you know that too. Perhaps you don't know that your marriages depend on us. Or - and here I'm becoming just a little grand - that the proper business of any prostitute is to become a saint.

I sold my body for the first time at five o'clock in the afternoon on August 29, 1987.

I did it for that most mundane of reasons - I was out of work, and I was broke.

The decision did not strike me as the first step in a spiral of degradation. I had never had any theoretical objections to the selling of sex. It seemed not much different from selling my editorial skills. I just never thought that anyone would pay good money to have sex with me. I thought hustlers had to be young, hung and full of come - or at least one of the three. But a friend who is young-ish and hung-ish - and was the one real live whore I actually knew - explained that, in the skin trade as anywhere else, there is such a thing as niche marketing. 'Sell your muscles,' he told me. 'Sell the fact that you're hairy. Sell your age. Not everybody's attracted to young guys'.

A theme running through this text is that the stories people tell, whether these are sexual stories or work stories or some combination thereof, emanate from encounters. The story above written by Gerald touches on many of the issues discussed throughout this text. Men enter escorting for numerous reasons. They may hold other jobs. They come to escorting at varying times in their life course. They do not need to have tight figures that meet stereotypical body ideals. These men can market themselves according to what their bodies give them to work with. The touching encounter is body-based. The encounters that escorts have with clients are about bodies coming together but are also about men caring for other men. Encounters shape the stories people tell about their relations with others.

Social scientists, activists, policy makers and journalists have increasingly invoked the idea of 'sex work' to talk about commercial sex, yet there has been little understanding of the intricacies of what sex and work mean across the various sectors of the commercial sex industry, especially not as it regards commercial sex between men. I have attempted to tell a story about how male-for-male internet escorts, who are only one unique sector of the commercial sex industry, make sense of sex and work. I have located my project not only in

relation to sociological literature concerning sex work but literature concerning sexuality in order to show that the sex of sex work is not pre-determined by innate drives or fully scripted according to cultural tropes. Bolton (1995:141) suggests “sex is arguably the ultimate dissolution of boundaries between individuals,” but this dissolution has two tendencies, what I have referred to as a closed tendency and an open tendency. Neither the escort, client, or researcher can assume in advance what will occur during the encounter, the shifts in meaning concerning sex and work that might arise, or the swerves in life course that may result.

### *Sex Work Revisited*

Healey (2001:236) argues that social scientists who study commercial sex must go “beyond received definitions of prostitution as a sex-for-cash trade-off”. I have argued that male-for-male internet escorting is transitory insofar as the encounters are itinerant and anonymous, but intense insofar as they are corporeal and full of social meaning. Male-for-male internet escorting is intimate insofar as escorts and clients can develop friendships and trust, at the same time as being impersonal insofar as particular escorts may simply want to get in and out as quickly as possible. Male-for-male internet escorting is physical when the thrust of the encounter is to touch, to be near another body, but also social as much as the encounter is arranged through frequent internet communications. Conversation and confession between escort and client is central to the joint action they partake in.

The idea of ‘sex work’ is politically important as an organizing metaphor concerning the labour struggles of people involved in commercial sex. I would never argue that sex workers and their allies should abandon struggles for safer working conditions and basic respect. Yet the idea of ‘sex work’ becomes increasingly blurry the more I speak with and think about the sex and work lives of male-for-male internet escorts. Much of what escorts do

is not exactly work, and it is not exactly sex. I have tried to emphasize where these boundaries blur in male-for-male internet escorting and how these imbrications of sex and work might matter to sociological conceptualizations of sex and work. Instead of locating the meaning of sexuality outside of the encounter in some ultimate referent of sexology or psychoanalysis, I have been taken in by the sexual stories escorts share after coming together with others. In exploring the sex and work of escorts I have not only been trying to describe their relations, I also have demonstrated the way sex and work are integral to biographies. The sex of sex work for escorts is narrated as part of their sex life. There are a few reasons for this. For one, anonymous sex between men, commercial or not, leads to sociality (Dean, 2009; Ricco, 2002). The encounter is not simply an economic exchange. Second, the escorts I spoke with tend to be older than most male sex workers (see Minichiello et al., 2008 for a comparative sample), influencing the way these men narrate their sense of self and the way they engage with clients. Yet we cannot assume that the sex of sex work is what either the escort or the client are after. Sometimes what escorts and clients do together concerns not sex but camaraderie, the idea of friendship as a way of life that Foucault leaves us with.

Instead of locating the meaning of work in the lexicon of political economy (for example, use value or exchange value), I have investigated the varying work narratives escorts share about what they do. I have shown how male-for-male internet escorts use a labour vocabulary to describe what they do while at the same time do not have much interest in sex work activism and advocacy. There are some reasons for this. Whereas for a long time working in the sex trade meant being present, on-street or in a bar/hotel, with other sex workers, today most sex work takes place online or is mediated through internet communication, which creates a different sort of work space. The internet makes possible

work that is no longer tied to a particular locale (Thompson and Smith, 2009). The labour process of male-for-male internet escorting is individuated, because the internet allows the encounters to be arranged from a distance. The internet does not seem to be used by these escorts to create e-communities amongst themselves. This individuated labour process of internet escorting detaches escorts from conventional settings of sex work (e.g. the stroll, the agency), making interaction with other escorts uncommon, therefore inhibiting any notion of the collective labourer that could be shared between them. At the same time, the labour process of male-for-male internet escorting differs greatly from the ill-treatment common with on-street sex trade and even bar hustling – internet escorts are dealing with a clientele that more or less represents the transnational capitalist class, but more importantly this clientele is often seeking camaraderie and temporary companionship. There are substantial differences in labour process across the commercial sex industry. The messaging and recruitment sex work activists use to build the movement must be situational, strategic and as diverse as the industry itself. Some male escorts reject the subject position ‘sex worker’ and reject the sex work movement. Yet other male escorts support the movement. Some identify as ‘sex workers’ and express solidarity with other people who sell sexual services despite differences in labour process. For instance, Frank from Toronto argues “the anti-human trafficking movement is a front for anti-prostitution. Escorting is a service, not evil,” and what he points to is the inclination for prohibitionist feminists and other moral entrepreneurs to lump all kinds of commercial sex together in an effort to outlaw them.

Grounding this text in the life history narratives of male-for-male internet escorts, I have purposefully complicated ideas concerning sex and work more than sorted out which drawer these men fit in the armoire of social scientific categorization. What I hope that this

lengthier story focused on male-for-male internet escorting has demonstrated is that there are significant differences between the varying forms of commercial sex.

### *Expanding Understandings of Sex and Work*

With male-for male internet escorting, escorts do not often know who their competition and allies are. They rarely share information about clients. Part of what this text does is assess how far claims that have been made concerning female sex workers can be carried over as it concerns male-for-male sex work. Discussing women's bodies as commoditized and exposed to the economic logic of exchange value has been effective for indicating how some female sex workers, especially on-street workers, suffer systemic abuse at the hands of male pimps and punters (O'Neil, 2001). Yet male-for-male internet escorting has a different rhythm; it is itinerant, intermittent, anonymous and, in some cases, involves elements of friendship. In still other cases, escorts describe it as they who are exploiting the clients. My point is this: not all sectors of the commercial sex industry operate with the same labour process. I have argued that male-for-male internet escorting involves the sexualization of the male body, which requires labour process theory be supplemented to account for the aesthetic labour (Warhurst and Nickson, 2009) of the self-employed. The labour process of male-for-male internet escorting is also highly individuated and mediated by internet communication, which results in there being less solidarity between and knowledge of other sex workers. Internet escorting is a form of work without managers, without bosses. It is also a precarious form of work insofar as it is not associated with guaranteed income as with contract salary or employment. Some men turn to escorting because previous salary or wage-based work has become more difficult to locate or as a way of avoiding the labour process of customer service work (also see Jeffrey and MacDonald, 2006). In the chapter concerning

vocabularies of work and labour process, these men convey varied and contrapuntal stories as it concerns escorting in relation to work and the idea of sex work.

The way we talk about men who have sex with men assumes hedonistic, selfish sex is the basis of their relations, which is what O’Byrne and colleagues (2008) call the ‘promiscuity paradigm’. Moreover, we often assume these men operate with a stable sexual identity, one that is ‘gay’ (Slavin, 2009). What escorts have to say concerning sexuality troubles the idea that the meaning of gay is fixed. Their talk about coming together with others also undoes conventional gendered stereotypes around effeminacy. In Chapter Six, I emphasized the varied life histories of men who sell sex to men. In Chapter Eight, I argued that there are diverse sexualities operating in male-for-male internet escorting, which means that analyses of female sex work cannot simply be applied to male sex work without considering these key differences. Queer theory positions itself as deconstructing identity categories such as gay and lesbian (Glick, 2000; O’Driscoll, 1996), but I have suggested that queer theory is unable to fully break from reifying sexual identities, which is why I have situated sexuality as produced out of encounters. In the chapter concerning research encounters, I demonstrated how escorts do not all share the same understanding of the words ‘gay’ and ‘sex worker’. And the conversation of gestures occurring during the interview in part constitutes the sense of sexual self for both participants. No vocabulary or definition of the situation could be assumed on my part in advance of meeting and chatting with the escort. For instance, towards the end of our interview I asked Harvey from Montréal “Has escorting changed the way you think about your own sexuality?” and he responded bluntly, “nope, still gay,” whereas other escorts did not view themselves, their bodies, their relations with others, and other bodies, according to the gay versus straight grid of intelligibility.

My purpose in this text has not been to reinstate the privileged masculine subject of classical sociological theory but to show how conventional categories of ‘men’ as gendered and sexual beings can break down through touching. In other words, I have tried to undo the privileged masculine subject, with its supposedly sturdy and impermeable body, by showing how touching between men can reproduce gender and sexual roles but can also offer turning points where those forms of subjectification unravel. I have argued that there is a specific logic of the lure in male-for-male internet escorting that is itinerant and anonymous. In the chapter regarding sexuality and confessions, I likewise demonstrated how unpredictable escorts’ understandings of sexuality are leading up to and during the corporeal encounter with the client. In the chapter on body work, I explored how central touching is to escorting and the ways this touching comes to be valued, though not exactly according to the ‘body capital’ logic of valorization. The facts of our bodies change over time, we find new ways to put our bodies together with others. Some sex work scholars suggest that sex workers feign intimacy with clients. Barriers are maintained between workers and clients as a matter of professionalism, it is argued. Rules are enforced about what kinds of body parts can be put into play. These arguments may work well as it concerns some sectors of the commercial sex industry. However, I contend that these claims about feigned intimacy reduce the sexual encounter to set scripts and fail to explore how a sense of sexuality is produced through the encounter, parting from these scripts. Sexual scripting theory puts too much emphasis on the predictability of sexual encounters, which alienates it from the interactionist tradition.

I also modify interactionist sociology by putting Blumer and Goffman into conversation with Foucault. Interactionist sociology is critiqued for naturalizing subjective sense-making. I emphasize the encounter (the dyad) rather than the individual as the start

point for inquiry. Interactionist sociology is critiqued as only offering a 'succession of nows,' which I overcome by placing emphasis on the closed tendency as a mechanism of social reproduction. I resist qualitative realism by arguing it is hard to know research participants, since my awareness of their lives is mediated by narrative, what I call storied encounters.

In male-for-male internet escorting, the sex of the work is often the sex of escorts' lives. In the chapter regarding biography, I considered how age-graded sexualities (González, 2007) influence the work escorts do and sometimes lead to de-sexualized touching. Age-grading of sexuality also influences how one works on their body to certain ends, to create a certain appeal, attract new clients and retain old ones. The end of escorting for many of these men comes at a time when they are unable to transition into a market that reflects their new persona related to age-graded sexuality. However, even if the facts of their bodies are such that the penis is removed from the centre of their relations with clients, some older escorts are entrepreneurial in finding novel ways to appease clients with other parts of their bodies. In the chapter on body work, I likewise considered how escorts talk about what they do in ways that are not fully explained with reference to sexuality, since bodily touching is not always sexualized. HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections matter for how escorts make sense of their work and certain bodies become made into problems (Kaye, 2003), but this understanding does not prevent escorts from temporarily breaking the touching barrier that has come to encase men with HIV/AIDS and bar them from intimacy.

The 'touching' of touching encounters refers to the mingling of bodies and the gestures of sexual conduct, but also the caring and mutuality that exists between men who have sex with men. Touching implies bodies coming together. The specificity of how men touch and what they touch together in sex encounters matters for how escorting work

happens. Even when the encounter moves away from sexuality and more towards friendship, which does happen, bodies are still together, though they may be de-sexualized. “Friendship is perhaps the most important site where virile heterosexual masculinities are endangered by the specter of homosexuality” (Garlick, 2002:560), such that an erotic relationality that is as yet unknown can be produced out of encounters that generate friendships. These encounters often happen with male clients who are on the road, alone, unable to live up to stereotypes of male beauty. While not all male-for-male escorts care about their work and their clients in this sense, for some escorts these encounters are about intimacy and compassion.

By introducing the concept of ‘touching encounters,’ I have tried to create an understanding of how sex relations are continually ordered according to discourses of sexuality and gender at the same time that there are moments of emergence immanent to the interaction where pervasive cultural scripts are broken down and reorganized. I have shifted from treating sex work as an economic exchange to understanding it as a relational sexual encounter. The sexing body is not a discursive effect, as in some versions of queer theory, but translates discourses of sexuality and gender through touching the self and others during some set of interactions. The two tendencies of the encounter, the closed tendency toward following sexual scripts as well as the open tendency towards creativity and unanticipated outcomes, are immanent to a set of interactions, produced by and modified through the ongoing conversation of gestures and confessions that sexual encounters are made up of.

### *Stories and Social Science*

This text emphasizes the importance of the encounter as a concept to inform research in the sociology of sexuality and the sociology of sex work. I highlight the stories men share about their escorting encounters with other men. Narratives are parts of the longer story one

tells about their life. The sharing and writing of narratives is something done by people together; narrative necessitates some joint action. Based on an interpretation of the encounter through story telling by the respondent, and the subsequent interpretation of numerous stories by the researcher to understand how people make sense of what they do, narrative analysis provides an epistemology to inform analysis of encounters post-hoc. I have also emphasized the limits of narrative research for trying to understand issues of corporeality and embodiment, so have introduced the idea of storied encounters as a way of conceptualizing the way people talk about and make sense of their relations after coming together with others.

Plummer's (1995) work on sexual stories has been influential for this project insofar as his focus on life history narratives and biography allows people to have a voice in the larger story being told. Plummer's approach to sexual stories is also flexible enough to account for other intersecting stories, such as stories about work and the body. The kinds of stories it is possible for us to tell are constrained by historical and social processes – one cannot tell a 'gay liberation' story before the 1960s. Similarly, one cannot tell the kinds of stories these men told me before the advent of the internet, because the internet has facilitated forms of sex work that are highly individuated and, at times, reject the idea of 'sex work'. The men I interviewed sometimes do not even think of what they do as work or think of what they have in common with other people who lead similar working and sex lives.

In his wide-ranging works, Foucault avoids a discussion of actual sex practices and instead focuses on an apparatus or dispositif of sexuality. In this text, I have been interested in how one element of that apparatus – discourse – is translated through touching during sexual conduct. My discussion of discourse in relation to touching encounters has been motivated by numerous calls to reconcile the work of Foucault with interactionist sociology

(see Denis and Martin, 2005; Hacking, 2004; Castellani, 1999; Cahill, 1998). I have argued that focusing on the storied encounter is a useful way to understand the touching encounters we have with others and how these encounters are shaped by discourses of sexuality. The narrated self is a self that is in flux and is made sense of in relation to broader discourses (Sermijn et al., 2008). My approach holds together an account of the constitutive force of discourse with an interpretive account of post-encounter story telling. Instead of a sexed body (Grosz, 1994), the body in the encounter is a sexing body that translates discourse through its imbrications with others, a sexing body that is the nodal point for mutating and proliferating discourses insofar as its gestures are reflexive and carry unforeseen affects.

A story is always a particular telling, to a particular someone. The narrator can use stylistic devices to accentuate certain features of the story. The respondent is telling the researcher the story they want to tell and the story they think the researcher wants to hear. Likewise, I have been telling a story that does not rely on longstanding tropes concerning the selling of sex but one that situates the sex and the work of male-for-male internet escorts closer to generic social processes and the touching encounters part and parcel of being close to others. There is a normalizing function to the sexological and psychoanalytic genres used to depict homoeroticism. “The pervasive narrative logic that inscribes AIDS as the life story of gay male sexuality, per se” (Ricco, 2002:34) is one example. For Barthes (1975), the point of writing is to evade language that is ready-made. The bliss one can receive from a text may “come only with the absolutely new” (pg. 40). Inspired by the stylistic twists and turns of these men’s stories concerning sex and work, I hope there has been enough new in this text to create for the reader, if not bliss, at least some recognition that the lives of male-for-male internet escorts touch many others in significant ways.

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## Appendix A – Sexual Cities

Stories are always told from somewhere. In analyzing the narratives of male-for-male internet escorts, I am attentive to how place matters in their talk about their work, sex and lives. Place matters in male-for-male escorting insofar as a city acts as a destination for clients who travel, and provides a market for escorts to provide services in. What all the cities in this study share (with Ottawa as a possible exception) is that they are global cities, insofar as they are interconnected with and indistinguishable from other nodes in networks of global capitalism. Green (2005) argues that these kinds of major urban areas support a wide range of sexual communities and diverse enclaves within sexual communities. Big cities with ‘gay villages’ serve as important sites where sexual subcultures and practices that depart from heteronormative conceptions of sexuality are achieved (Green, 2007b). Place also matters with male-for-male escorting because local cultures of gay masculinity in different cities tend to put more or less emphasis on some sexual practices compared to others (Connell, 2000).

Bernstein (2007:16) argues that the cities where sex work happens are “nodal points of transnational economic and cultural processes”. What does this mean in concrete terms of finding and working with clients? Some escorts are dissatisfied with the cities they work in:

The clientele here sucks. The reason I say that is because Ottawa is still very much, even though it is a capital city it is very conservative in nature, a lot of gays and lesbians here work for the civil service who are government officials who work in this sector which is huge. Listen, if you are over a certain age, 40 or 50 or older, 55 and up, chances are they are closeted, they live out in the burbs or they live with a partner they have been with for 20 years, it is not the same mentality as Montréal or Toronto ...the market for escorts and hustlers is really small, and because it is small it is very competitive. If I lived in Montréal right now, and I plan to move there, it would be much busier... I can vouch for that cause I know people who are sex workers and when this town is dead it is dead, everyone has left town or is on vacation. Certain months are harder (Tyler, Ottawa).

As Tyler's narrative makes clear, Ottawa has its own specificities as a city when it comes to escort work. These specificities have to do with the clientele, as well as the acceptance of sex and of sex work. Some say Ottawa offers low demand compared to Montréal, whereas others argue Montréal is in fact the most awful city to work in (see Mark's narrative below). The city in which one lives also matters in terms of how far the pay goes in providing for basic services: "my rent in London was over a 1000 pounds a month and an in-call rate was 100 pounds, so say 10 jobs to pay the rent. Here, my rent is 1000 dollars a month and my in-call rate is \$180, so six jobs to pay the rent" (Garry, Toronto).

As another escort explains, place matters for the kinds of services one can offer, the prices one can set, and how sustainable the work is over the long term:

London is a lot like New York, you have all these people who have a lot of money and not a lot of time, London and New York are the best cities to be escorts. I travel to New York to see clients probably one week every three months. California is not a great place for escorting. You need a city that is condensed, people with no time, people with money, people who are working hard, no bullshit, they know what they want and they can pay for it. In Los Angeles, there are a lot of people pretending they are something they are not. In Berlin, there is so much emphasis on free sex, it is a wild sex frontier. You need people with serious busy lives, or people in repressed Catholic cities. Toronto in Canada is a great city because everyone is so busy, it was fantastic working there. In Montréal, you won't make a dime because they think of sex differently there. They think like Berlin. Boston is good because it is repressed. So you need upwardly mobile people who are working hard. I have been to Paris, Rome, Toronto, Berlin, Montréal, New York, Washington DC, Boston, Miami, Dallas, Houston, Chicago, Seattle, San Francisco, Las Vegas and Los Angeles doing this work (Mark, London).

The city that an escort works in matters for the way the encounter between client and escort will occur. The difference between Montréal and other cities, according to Harvey, is that "it is accepted here. Massage is normal. Rub and tug. It is very accepted. Vancouver, Toronto, the USA, it is looked at as prostitution, here it is not looked upon as prostitution at all". As

Frank from Toronto reiterates, labour process in the USA differs from Canada because of the intensity of policing:

I have been to Detroit. Made a trip to Chicago, I only broke even on that trip. I did not turn a profit, I was only going to learn how to escort in the USA. It is a different game. I have not made any other trips, because I had a boyfriend for a few months who would have been worried sick. Then we broke up. So I am free to go to the USA, but I am afraid of it. It is different because you have to dance around on the phone and in your emails, you have to pretend you are offering a massage, you cannot answer blocked numbers, the police will set traps, they will do stings, if someone calls and says do you suck do you fuck you have to play dumb, assume that is a police officer trying to entrap you, say you do not talk about that over the phone. You can only see clients who know what they are doing. They ask about prices, they tell you a particular time and place, then you arrive, some are still not with it, they ask if touching is allowed, and of course touching is allowed, this is prostitution. But you do not bring that stuff up in the USA. Whereas in Canada you can say I top, I bottom. When I work in Toronto I do not have to worry about arrest, being convicted. In the USA, it is frightening, it is hard to make money because you have to dance around talking about sex and you have to turn down a lot of clients you suspect might be police. The police are always out to get you.

It is common to think of work as tied to larger national structures, while sex, emotions, and intimacy are relegated to the interpersonal realm. This binary is artificial. Sex work is situated in sexual cities that shape the touching encounters that are possible between clients and escorts. Some cities are more 'in the closet' than others. Ottawa is an example of one city where the clients want this activity to be kept a secret at all costs:

It's a government town...There's a lot of people just in for a day or two, and or they're here for a couple of months with a different government or an agency...a transient population, temporary workers or whatever. And a lot of military people seems to be the other...Most of them are pretty good like higher ranks want to be dominated, like tie them up and whip them and that sort of thing seems to be the like the reverse of the role that they're in their regular every day life (Bob, Ottawa).

The sexual city is a global city, linked by transportation and communication networks. Both escorts and clients use these networks to get what they want and to arrange encounters. The cities of Toronto and Montréal also have specificities that influence the way the work of escorting is carried out:

Toronto is a hub. If you're leaving Canada to go to the States, if you're leaving Canada to go to Europe you know your chances are you're going to come to Toronto to get there. It's also a financial, like it's a tourist destination ...and it's the business capital of Canada, right? So it attracts all of the, 'Oh I'm going away on business to Toronto'. So these guys are getting their rocks off while whoever is at home doing whatever. So I think that would maybe make a difference. Montréal is a party town, right? People go there to party, you're not going to, you don't usually go to hire a ho. Like I mean a 60 year old man isn't going to go hire a ho in Montréal like when he's from out of town unless he's there on business (Eddy, Toronto).

Here is a good description of the way the work of escorting is networked with global flows of capital and people. The intimate and the proximate are being reconfigured by transnational flows of people and capital (Povinelli and Chauncey, 1999). Internet escorts are catering to the transnational capitalist class, highly mobile, highly educated, and so the services that escorts offer must appear accordingly – high-class and professional. Despite how extensive the network becomes – the liquid sex of escorts mimics the liquidity of capital, flowing across borders – and despite all of the travel from place to place, in the end the escort and client must come together, to meet in the flesh, in the encounter.