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Market Moralities in the Field of Commercial Sex

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Introduction

In this paper I argue that Punternet, a website where men write reviews of their heterosexual commercial sex encounters, acts as a calculative device (Callon and Muniesa 2005) for the creation of value in the market for sex. Punternet has been operating since 1999, and 'aims to promote better understanding between customers and ladies in hopes that everyone may benefit, with less stressful, more enjoyable and mutually respectful visits' (<http://www.punternet.com/index1.html>, accessed 12th August 2011). I argue that the accounts written by Punternet authors are moral stories where 'good' value in the transaction is associated with a reading of the lived body of the sex worker as 'good'. Sex workers are seen to provide 'value for money' when either they fully accede to the marketised transaction (by being 'professional'), or (more commonly) when they appear to transcend the market through providing more than the contracted services. I contend that Punternet authors produce a moralised reading of the field of commercial sex because of their status as authors, men and customers. As authors who tell the story within the Punternet community, as men who expect sexual pleasure, and as customers who deserve what they pay for; they are moral arbiters. They use the language of the market to make moral claims, and do moral work by constituting the moral order of commercial sex, complicating simplistic distinctions between value and values. I begin this paper with a discussion of the moral standing of sex talk and prostitution, before exploring actor-network theory's understandings of markets to suggest how Punternet operates as a calculative device in the production of 'value' as it qualifies good and bad market transactions. Value and worth are commonly used to refer to issues of cost and belief, to economics and morality. The operation of markets cannot be separated from agents' understandings of what is good and in the final part of the paper I analyse Punternet reports to explore what sorts of behaviour count as good in this context.

Sex talk, prostitution and morality

Punternet is a technology for promulgating sex talk, making use of the possibilities for communication offered by the internet: easier access to viewing, reading and writing about sex in consumer culture (Bauman 2003, pp.19-20). The apparent liberalisation of a 'striptease culture' (McNair 2002) seems to encourage sex talk, though such talk retains an edge of moral taint and boundaries are policed. The liberalisation of sexual behaviour, including sex talk, reflects a particular conceptualisation of modern subjectivity as individualised and commodified (Bauman 2003). This perspective acts as a powerful moral pull towards normalising the right to a range of sexual behaviours that might formerly have lain outside the 'charmed circle' of acceptable sexuality. For many, commercial sex lies in the domain of the abject, along with some expressions of homosexuality, sex outside marriage with multiple partners, fetish and so on (Rubin 1984, p152). Activities outside the charmed circle are deemed both ethically problematic, and lacking the human complexity and emotional nuance of 'normal' sexuality. Nonetheless, commercial sex is increasingly public, and increasingly tolerated. There remains a tension between the drive towards tolerating or accepting sexual practices where those who engage are seen as making legitimate choices as agents in modern society, and arguments that such practices are invariably degrading and inappropriate, either because sex – like other intimacies – ought not be marketised (see Zelizer 2007 for an interesting discussion), or because those selling sex cannot be making a 'free' choice (Barry 1995). For example, whilst 'prostitution' may arguably retain pariah status in late modern society, other forms of commercial sex such as lapdancing and strip clubs are increasingly visible (Brents and Hausbeck 2007).

Commercial sex is a field full of moral ambiguity, where emotional and emotive debate dominates. Questions of morality are raised as soon as prostitution is mentioned; even the term 'prostitution' carries a moral load. Should it be possible to purchase sex/intimacy? Should women's bodies be available for purchase by menⁱ? Are prostitutes exploited or making free choices? Should the state intervene to regulate, legalise or criminalise? There are extensive discussions in academic literature on prostitution/sex work where moral debates are played out. For Jeffreys (2008) men's purchase of women's sexual services and bodies is exploitative; for Chapkis (1997), amongst others, women's choice to sell sexual services in a market economy trumps any accusation of exploitation, (these debates are reviewed in Kesler (2002)). The

limitations of 'pro' and 'anti' positions for understanding the field of sex work have been extensively discussed (O'Connell Davidson 2006) leading, for example, to work that considers the cultures of commercial sex (Agustín 2005), or its modes of organisation (Brents and Hausbeck 2007). Punternet itself has been the subject of study. Earle and Sharpe (2007) offer a reading of Punternet as a site for the performance of masculinity. Sanders (2008a), a more thorough study, suggests online and offline worlds interact far more than Earle and Sharpe acknowledge, and Sanders (2008b) delineates men's desire for intimacy in the transaction. Whilst existing work on men who pay for sex offers important insights into this practice, more explicit attention to the economic life of commercial sex is needed. It is too simple to say, as Earle and Sharpe (2007: 30) do, for example, that 'mainstream values' label paying for sex as immoral, and punters react against this labelling. There is no straightforward 'mainstream value': the 'charmed circle' is disputed by those outside it, and its values more contingent than Rubin (1984) allows. Punters do not take a simple and coherent moral position, but make use of the discourse and practice of market exchange to make moral claims in the context of a contested moral code. This generates a complex and ambiguous morality, which needs unpicking to see how moral work is done and how judgements of worth are made. Morality is understood not as a disembodied and universalistic abstraction (Hekman, 1995), but made through contingent, complex practices, including the kinds of evaluations and markings of good and bad practices and persons that characterise Punternet.

Punternet: methodology

Punternet is one of several websites comprised of customer reviews of commercial sex encounters with women working in the indoor sex market, referred to on the site as WGs (working girls¹¹). It does not cover other forms of commercial sex, and so neither does the analysis presented here. The website contains several sections, including advice to punters, spaces for WGs to promote themselves, a forum and a collection of 'field reports' (note the connotations of the spy reporting back from enemy territory), where men write accounts of paid-for sex. Field reports are written accounts of varying length containing information about date, time, duration, location, price, contact details of the sex worker and a story of the sex encounter. They usually contain assessment of the working girl's body and sexual performance, in varying detail and all

authors are asked to say whether they would return and whether they can recommend the sex worker. The website is consciously heterosexual, referring to sex encounters between male customers and female workers, although some field reports refer to encounters between one male customer and two women, where the performance of lesbianism is an attraction for the customer. All encounters on Punternet have taken place in the UK, and comparable sites exist for other regions.

The analysis in this paper draws on the field reports only, as I am interested in how stories about sex are told. These are prime instances of naturally occurring data (Silverman 2001), and are publically available. At the time of writing there are 105673 field reports on the site (<http://www.punternet.com> accessed 13th September 2011). I took a 1% sample of authors using SPSS 'select cases function' at an earlier moment in the site's history, when there were 16,590 named authors (it is possible for one punter to use more than one author name) who had written a total of 40,632 field reports. I sampled by author, rather than sampling by report (as Earle and Sharpe (2007) did), in order to compare author's 'recommended and 'not recommended' experiences. The focus here is always on the account of the experience, not the truth of the story.

I conducted a slow, in-depth and iterative analysis of the content of field reports exploring several directions of analysis, including how moral work was being done (see Pettinger 2011 for another). In a second interrogation of the data I looked explicitly for claims to good and bad experiences, and considered how markets were talked about in these claims. In the third stage of analysis, I selected a small number of reports to illustrate the broad argument. Using a small number of reports is preferable to presenting brief quotations from multiple reports as it reveals how the reports are constituted as storiesⁱⁱⁱ. This form of presentation makes more visible the workings out and analysis that I have done, reflecting Law's (2004) critique of social science methods. Rather than making a claim about a reality that is independent, prior and singular (Law 2004, pp.145), I tell a small and interesting story, having cast my methodological net more widely to find data that offers different sorts of insight to that which would be achieved by standard sociological tools such as qualitative interviewing (Law 2004).

My interest here is in how stories about paid for sex are told and I have used Riessman's (2008) narrative methodology for this. Narrative analysis involves exploring but how the story is told, and to whom, rather than focusing on the truth of the account. How the story is produced in a particular form reveals something of what matters to the storyteller. However, analysis of narrative should not be disconnected from analysis of what is material and the narrative makes sense only when its mode of presentation is considered. Stories are collated as field reports in a uniform, structured, database format with space for free text, as part of the more complex mediating website device. Naturally occurring data is suitable for actor network analysis for as long as this complexity is considered. The field reports are produced for an implied audience of 'like-minded' men, and play a part in producing this likemindedness, doing moral work by developing behavioural norms and teaching newcomers how to behave (Sanders 2008a, pp.73-79) as occupational cultures do for WGs (Sanders 2005a and 2005b). The conventionalised format and language (e.g., acronyms for sexual practices) serve to standardise the stories and show common ground between author and reader. Reports vary in length and detail, and in how positive they are: the stated motivation for writing is often a bad experience that the author wants to complain about on Punternet, where he can expect other men to read it. In the next section, I consider how to conceptualise the moralising that Punternet field reports do.

Value, Values, Worth and Valuation

Models of economic behaviour tend to presume that markets are morally naïve and markets are separate from the moral sphere (Fourcade, and Healey 2007). In this paper, value is conceptualised as existing in both economic and social realms, and between them. The slippage between realms is of great significance in identifying how valuations of all kinds are made and hence to the central claim that evaluation does moral work. Nelson and England (2002) point out that feminist work has long indicated the way that mainstream economics' account of market behaviour is a model not a 'real' representation. Acting as though the market model is a truth, 'enshrines' *homo economicus*, the individual, separate self as the basis for social (and moral) action, and neoclassical theories

'would have us think that people drop their emotions, their values, and even (in the case of workers) their individual will at the threshold of market interactions. (Nelson and England 2002,

p.4).

In the field under consideration here, characterised by relational engagements between buyers and sellers, where the latter do emotional labour and where the nature of the intimacy for sale is negotiated, it is particularly appropriate to consider the market not as governed by internal laws where self-interest and rationality prompt transactions to favour profit maximisation, but as a realm where moral work is done. To do this, the 'values' that are referred to need to be discussed.

The term 'value' is conceptualised as a series of difficult entanglements between different orders. Firstly, the moral and the ethical (both terms used interchangeably, and advisedly) are of central importance. These refer to questions of the rightness and wrongness of actions, beliefs, practices, with values contributing to moral/ethical orders. As a sociologist, my interest is in how actions, beliefs, practices are valued and judged as right, wrong, good and bad, as MacIntyre says, 'moral concepts are embodied in and partially constitutive of forms of social life' (2002: 2). 'Value' here involves consideration of what is good, and how good something is, and what kind of good it is, and values contribute to the making of contingent moral codes. Moral philosophy and axiology are obviously enormous fields in their own right, full of dispute over what counts as a value. Despite this complexity and history, it is possible and important to explore how things come to be seen as good in specific instances, and what this judgement does to social life.

Secondly, the order of the economic, where value refers to things measured with money: costs and prices, and rendered distinct from the study of values by the fabled Parsonian pact, which David Stark tells as a cute story of Talcott Parsons wandering down a Harvard corridor to negotiate with the economists, so that, in Stark's words 'You, economists, study value; we, the sociologists, will study values' (Stark 2009, p.7). The economist's 'is' and the sociologist's 'ought' were separated. It has been unusual, until recently, for sociologists to give proper attention to the social relations of economic action. Prostitution is a useful locus for thinking this through as it 'describes the line in a society between what must be given as a gift and what may be exchanged as a commodity' (Prasad 1999 p.182).

Some economic sociologists resolve the problem of how to deal with economic life by conceptualising economics as embedded in social relations. Prasad uses an 'embeddedness' model in her study of prostitution. In interviews with prostitute users, Prasad finds that 'the prostitution exchange is thoroughly saturated with the trappings of the market, and yet it is justified in moral terms' (1999: 203). Moral ideas may explain market participation, but for Prasad, values do not make markets. Her tacit adherence to the value-values distinction generates a misplaced certainty about what happens when judgment happens: for example, implying that cost does not influence judgements. A different mode of attention is needed to address what is being done in the course of an everyday slippage between value and values.

Smith (1988) advocates that value be understood as contingent: 'a changing function of multiple variables' (1988, p.11). Value is actively produced, and is neither an inherent property of objects nor a subjective projection (see also Fourcade 2011, p.1724). Values are produced in market systems, and in 'personal economies' comprised of the needs and interests of a subject (1988, pp.30-31). What kinds of 'variables' might contribute to specific contingent values? In the case of sex work, this involves thinking about how price and market norms (e.g. of consumer sovereignty) and the moralising value judgements about personhood and body made about sex workers are entwined. Evaluations and judgements contribute to the production of the moral order of commercial sex through framing good and bad practices and good and bad actors.

David Stark addresses the value-values separation by paying attention to 'worth' and the processes of valuation it implies.

'[T]he polysemic character of the term – *worth* – signals concern with fundamental problems of value while recognizing that all economies have a moral component. Rather than the static fixtures of value and values, it focuses instead on ongoing processes of *valuation*' (Stark 2009, pp.7-8).

Assessments of worth rely on a wide range of criteria, some explicitly economic, some explicitly moral and often (explicitly and implicitly) using both registers simultaneously. Economic and moral 'goods' may overlap or contradict. Judgements about 'value for money' may often be judgements about the moral worth of the

woman whose work and body is being valued. Field reports do not evaluate what the cost is or should be, but whether the cost was worth it. Worth involves a calculative judgment, and in the course of market action a claim to worth is simultaneously a statement about value and values. So the group of Hungarian factory workers studied by Stark felt that, 'honor and appreciation on the part of management are hollow and disingenuous if they are not also expressed in the currency of higher earnings' (2009: 50). High pay is essential to signal status, but worth – the moral judgement – demands explicit recognition that the high pay is deserved because of the standard of work, assessed using 'ordinary categories of judgement' (Fourcade 2011, p.1726). This discussion suggests that valuation is processual, and the values of things 'emerge from sequences of transformations, initiated by people, that modify their status' (Çalışkan and Callon 2009, p386). Actor network theory offers a useful way of understanding how valuation happens, and what valuation does.

Actor network theorists argue that economic activity is performative, market technologies shape actors to conform to what market theory, or ways of operating expect (Callon, et al. 2002; Callon and Muniesa 2005). Here, market actions are not simply rational responses to the interaction of supply, demand and price, instead economic activity is carried out by actors who have learned how markets work, that is to say, how they ought to work. Punters learn what the price list above reception signals about the exchange of sexual services. Markets are not pure, and Actor-network theory permits, and even encourages including the normative when considering markets as 'economic markets cannot exist without moral *agencements* or, conversely, any altruistic *agencement* is calculated' (2007, p.347). Market activities are formed by normative pressures and contribute to forming the moral field, indeed they are 'saturated with moral meaning' (Fourcade and Healy 2007, p.300) as they serve to normalise behaviour. Market exchanges constitute, and are constituted by, values, norms and morality. The ordinary punter, doing 'economics in the wild' (Callon 2007, p.345) is a 'partially configured actor' (Mackenzie and Millo 2003, p.141) who does not drop his sociality as he opens his wallet. Instead, he sees morality through markets and markets through a moral lens as he does his complex work of evaluation. It is here that worth is made, for example when judging that the 'good worker' is a professional who puts her *self* on sale (Pettinger 2011).

Judgements about value and work are made in an 'economy of qualities'. Qualification is a process through which goods come to be positioned in markets as 'qualities are attributed, stabilised, objectified and arranged' (Callon et al. 2002, p.199). Qualification gives meaning to products and is an ongoing process through the career of the product. In many markets, it involves work done by advertisers and marketing, and in some instances by consumer rights magazines (Mallard 2007), of which Punternet is a distant cousin. Callon and Muniesa conceptualise markets as collective devices that produce 'compromises' about the production, distribution and valuation of goods (2005: 1229), through neither a purely quantitative, impersonal process, nor one based entirely in judgement (2005: 1230-1), but incorporating multiple practices. Goods are made calculable via objectification, singularisation, and the co-elaboration of their properties by calculative agencies that involve humans and non-humans in a 'twosome...that conceives of the calculation and performs it' (Callon and Muniesa 2005, p.1237). Comparably, the standardised reporting of Punternet intervenes to judge and recommend, it calculates and monitors 'good value' by assessing the cost of the transaction, the benefits gained by the customer and the appropriateness of the sex worker's action. In doing so, values of all kinds are drawn into the judging process and moral work is done. Conventional moralities also influence the economic valuation of some acts, so that more intimate practices (kissing) and non-standard sexual acts (anal sex) are more costly than intercourse. In the next section of this paper, I explore how transactions are qualified and calculations of value made in Punternet field reports

The calculative device of Punternet

The field report (Candy/Mortified), below^{iv}, illustrates how Punternet operates as a calculative device to qualify goods. In the case of prostitution, the goods for sale are WGs' bodies, sexual services and interaction, and so Punternet contributes to 'qualifying' embodied market actors.

"Candy" of Central London
Field Report number XXXXX - posted xx xxx 2006
From: mortified
Location: Central London
Location 2: South Kensington
Establishment: Friendsplus

Web URL: <http://www.XXX>
Phone: XXXXX
Date: 15th March
Day of Week: Thurs
Time of Day: 7.15pm
Type of Visit: Incall
Time Spent: 50 mins
Price: 250
Her Place: Her hotel room

Description: Blonde, bust (enhanced) tanned and very beautiful.

Comments: I have never posted before but was really disappointed in this punt so thought I would make the effort. It may save someone else some money.

I had spotted Candy on [another] site but now on [Friendsplus]. Fancied her rotten so decided to visit when in London. They tracked her down for me and I may well have taken two hours had Candy not been such a rush to get out to dinner.

I went specifically for the A-levels with such a petit and beautiful girl but it all went wrong from the start. A quick shower and onto the bed. About 1 minute of oral and shall "I put a condom on now". No lets take it slower! This was the general feeling I had the whole visit, and felt under pressure just to get it done so she could get back out again. Hardly sexy and the old boy reacted accordingly. I said "slow down and we'll do two hours" but Candy was more intent to get out it seems.

Overall Candy is lovely to look at, probably quite sweet in all honesty but after a fall back position of a combination hand/blow job and CIM (spat) I was back in the shower, out of the door and £250 (and two 10 quid taxis) lighter after 50 minutes and wishing I really hadn't bothered.

Frankly for this sort of money I really do expect someone to take a bit of time and trouble and at least try to relax not hurry me. I am not 18 and not a machine and cannot orgasm to deadlines. Really am very disappointed as the anticipation was so much better than the reality. Its quite put me off bothering and I should have watched the soccer instead.

Recommended: No

Would You Return: No

To make sense of the content, we must also consider the form of the report. The first 15 lines of this field report are standardised and provide the interested reader with contact details for the WG, providing searchable information about price and services. This is the objectification of the encounter. The 'description' paragraphs singularise the encounter by delineating the place, the space/time of the encounter and Candy's body, and then the properties of the encounter are elaborated. Calculations are made during the discussion of the author's experience as to whether the encounter was worthwhile, leading to the standard assessment

at the end of the form: 'recommend' and 'return' (the crucial but not sole markers of valuation in field reports). Candy charged a lot for a rushed appointment where she did not pay due attention to Mortified's old body, and so was deemed not to have provided a good service. In the next section, I consider the three dimensions of the narrative of calculation in field reports contribute to the form that valuation takes: storytelling, gender and being a consumer.

Authoring the calculative device

The field report is produced by an author who is a storyteller, man and consumer. These three dimensions demonstrate how the field report is a calculative device that does moral work. Mortified is the author and so validates his own position, experience and judgement. We have no insight into him beyond the field report where his desires appear visible. Instead, the report offers a constructed story that focuses on the embodied forms and practices of Candy, and takes for granted that his desires and preferences are legitimate, and that he is fit to judge.

The author's maleness matters and field reports present heterosexual male desire for sexual difference, desire for the sometimes mysterious female body. Women often appear as a fully embodied 'natural' other, in contrast to (in this instance at least) Mortified's somewhat ironic disembodiment of himself. The male sexual actor makes claim to subject status by not *quite* admitting to a body (for example, Mortified refers to his penis as 'the old boy' to produce a distance), even when the story being told is about his sexual experiences. As a calculative device, Punternet relies on women's association with body, as male customers rationalise, calculate and evaluate. Mortified speaks of his body only to excuse it, although he fully measures and assesses Candy's. She seems not immediately comprehensible to him, an 'enigma' (Grosz 1994, p.191) in part because he seems confused by the contradictions that arise between what she brings as woman (her sexual difference, her female and feminised body) and what she brings as (good) worker, the sexual services, professionally delivered. She is containable and makes sense when she can be positioned as female (via observation of her biology), as woman (caring) or as worker (good service provider). However, Mortified is confused because she does not offer feminised nurturing work as a gift beyond the contract,

and he cannot understand why she, who is so desirable, is in a rush. Field reports here are devices that demystify women by making them assessable and by stressing the market, the obligations of the paid worker and the legitimacy of the paying customer. Hence hierarchies between customer and worker match up with those between men and women, and are transmuted into market relations as part of the valuation process.

The male author is a consumer, and the consumer experience is central to his storytelling:

‘the language adopted by men is one of trade. Women are the sellers and men, the buyers. As with any such transaction there is a concern with quality, quantity and price’ (Earle and Sharpe 2007, p.83).

Punternet reports tend to presume consumer sovereignty. The good consumer is rational and makes utility maximising choices (Mortified did his research before visiting Candy). He may be habituated to legitimating his preferences and desires on websites such as *Ebay* and *Trip Advisor*, or at least be familiar with consumer uses of the internet. Desires are commodified, and punters search and select from a menu of women of different ages, sizes and ethnicities, and who provide different services to please their tastes. Consumers appear as unbound individuals, and Punternet offers them space to judge and assess others. Mortified wishes he had chosen differently (indeed, swapping sex for a different consumer activity, watching football), and feels let down.

In Prasad's (1999) study of customers, market exchange was positively valued by stressing the right of the customer to choose. Prasad suggests customers draw on an understanding of what it is to be a moral *individual* in capitalist society and that commodified sexual services were seen as morally good when they were simple commodities, free of gift ties. However, the analysis here suggests that punters understand commercial sex transactions in more complex terms, with the market being more than an individual encounter between buyer and seller. Field reports assess and calculate the consumption experience; it is a collective, implicitly moral project to create boundaries and judgements around value, good and bad service, and hence is a calculative device. In the next section, I consider how ‘good’ and ‘bad’ are discussed,

often around an idea about 'value for money', recognising the often slippery and potentially contradictory movements between value and values that this implies.

Value for money

The phrase 'value for money' (VFM) is used often in Punternet field reports to indicate the quality of a transaction and is a discursive instance of qualification. Value for money is a judgement made by a customer as to whether he thinks the purchase was worthwhile: did he gain, or did he pay more than he should given the quality of the product? Value for money is hence a moral claim about how good and bad service is rendered through the market; it is a claim to worth. Value is not the same as price, and does not equate to cheapest. It is a judgement about whether the price is a fair reflection of the perceived quality of the product. 'JOHNHOLMES', below, sees VFM as a combination of service, price and quality.

Field Report number XXXXX
From: JOHNHOLMES
Type of Visit: Incall
Time Spent: 40 mins
Price: 30

Her Place: parlour off Sheffield road, discreet entry, clean and tidy
Description: tall leggy about mid twenties and very attractive.
Comments: after a nice massage, ann told me HR, oral or sex were included in the price, but for an extra £10 i could combine any two services. Opted for the oral, and Ann started by putting the condom on with her mouth, a very nice touch, then on to one of the best blow jobs i've ever had...very good vfm!!!!!!

Recommended: Yes
Would You Return: Yes

JOHNHOLMES has written a brief account of his positive experience of Ann's sexual performance. The signifiers of worth, from the discreet and clean building to Ann's body and services, are part of the eventual judgement that the cost was worth it. A judgement about the worth of the service that labels the transaction as 'VFM' is often a way of describing others as morally good or bad (taking for granted author's right to evaluate). Low prices often relate to stories of poor quality service, such as dirty surroundings, or a worker who comes straight from a previous client (concerns about the implications of low prices for WGs are rare).

Expensive sex encounters can create expectations of more professional service performance, and a more engaged intimacy, and are more likely to be seen as failing to provide VFM (those who recommended the WG paid a mean price of £199 per hour, those who did not recommend spent an average of £164). The sex encounter, the body of the WG and the environment in which sex takes place all contribute to VFM, along with whether she is a good worker, assessed by her willingness and enthusiasm, and the quality of the services. In the next section I explore cases where behaviours other than the kind of skill Ann shows are under assessment, to show how complex are the evaluating judgements made in field reports.

Claiming goodness

Purchasing sex is presented in Punternet as a legitimate means to fulfil desire. However, field reports do sometimes contain moral qualms about punting, and are rife with moral ambiguities. The sense of the brothel as a risky place is revealed when punters describe their fears of being exploited by WGs or parlours which do not offer good value. The Punternet homepage acknowledges trafficking and the chance that women are being exploited, though none of the field reports in my sample made reference to this. However, the potential for commercial sex to damage WGs was a significant theme in reports, presented most often as a message to other authors to behave well towards a special WG, in order to keep her in the job she is good at. Such reports assert the author's belief in their own moral goodness, in order to claim the right to make judgements on others, including other punters. In the story told by Kinky, below, good practice and good behaviour are explicitly enumerated by a man who knows what he deserves, and this process delivers a judgment about Leesa.

Field Report number XXXX

From: Kinky

...

Time Spent: 30 min

Price: 70

Her Place: Entrance from alley around the back of a row of shops. I found it first but it looked a bit dodgy so I went back into the main road and called to see if I had it right. If you are not comfortable looking like you know what you are doing in a dark alley at night, it might be best to stick to daytime visits. Apart from that it was clean with comfortability about what you'd expect from a brothel.

Description: She is a bleach blonde, Late 40's with very large hanging breasts - which for me

was a real plus.

Comments: I opted for the VIP 45 min session because the menu made it look like I could get a bit of everything and cum however I wanted to. In the end this was the right choice but not for the reasons I started with. When I entered the room, there was a strong smell of nitrates that had belonged to the last customer. I cant stand this stuff and it makes it almost impossible for me to get an erection. ... This was not a good start I thought. Leesa then began in earnest and was making lots and lots of "ooh baby" noises.

I found this off putting because it was way over the top for what was really just her sitting on me wiggling her tits in my face. I asked her to stop though and she did. Then she attacked my cock in a way that might be good for others but again, just wasn't my style. To her credit though, each time I spoke to her about what I wanted, she changed tack and in the end I had a nice experience.... This just goes to show that communication is very important with any service provider. I know that there are some girls out there who don't give a shit what you want and just have their way of going about things and if you don't like it... tough shit. But Leesa stopped, listened, and did it the way I wanted. That to me is the sign of a pro... and someone I would want to go back to again and again.

Recommended: Yes

Would You Return: Yes

The opening discussion of the physical space sees Kinky speaking to those who might (unlike Kinky) feel at risk in such a place. Unlike Mortified, Kinky offers only a brief account of Leesa's body, focusing more on her service provision and the negotiation between the two of them. Good service is the standard for making judgement, and involves responding to his needs and giving an individualised performance to reflect his desires. Leesa is commended by Kinky as 'a pro' (and thereby a good worker) for her response to his complaints and requests. Though Kinky appears not to have enjoyed Leesa's performance, he does use the most explicit part of the calculative device and 'recommend' her, because as a good worker, she responded appropriately to the customer's demands. Each of the reports discussed so far present the author as the arbiter of good practice, and judges the working girls, drawing on a different conceptualisation of the good worker. In Mortified's account, the WG's body plays a stronger role than for Kinky, and in JOHNHOLMES', the sexual performance is central. In reading their own and each others' reports, authors generate shared understandings of acceptable practices and make value judgements about these practices. What is good is not abstract and universal, but contingent on the particularities of the encounter, and read through a market where gendered services are bought and sold.

The good professional

Authors produce value in the field of commercial sex through their assessments of the bodies and performances of WGs, and in doing so generate an understanding of a further dimension of goodness that has bearing on value and ethics in this market: the good professional worker. Rogerer presents Kerry as a good WG because of her appearance, and because her fondness for sex appears to offer her the job satisfaction working subjects are encouraged to aspire to. Furthermore, her sexual performance reveals her professional skills.

Field Report number XXXX

From: Rogerer

Type of Visit: Incall

Time Spent: 1hr

Price: 150

Her Place: Kerry has a number of great reviews on Punternet & as I was in Leeds on business, I wanted to see whether she lived up to her reputation for a quality shag.

Description: Early 20's, Stunning looking blonde with a body to die for. Fantastic tits, bigger than advertised on her site & an outstanding arse, which she loves being licked. I asked her to wear stockings & she duly obliged with a basque on top. She really looked the part & thanks Kerry for making the effort.

Comments: She gave me a great body to body massage to start with & her tits felt wonderful on my back - very relaxing! She soon moved on to my JT^v with a wonderful blow job. She moved me around & proceeded to give me the best & most unusual (position) reverse cowgirl I have ever had & her pussy & ass looked wonderful as she came. Finally we moved into mish & I finished off

A real quality shag, excellent value from a seasoned performer. Only minor complaint was a lack of eye contact throughout. Still you can't have everything! Overall 8/10 & worth a return visit next time I'm "up north!"

Recommended: Yes

Would You Return: Yes

In this case (as for Kinky), Rogerer valorises the WG for being good at sex and giving gifts of pleasure, and for being a professional worker who takes her work seriously. This makes for VFM. In some reports, 'professionalism' was presented as problematic if it made too visible the transactional nature of the encounter, if it appeared without feeling, without 'authenticity', and without an appropriate emotional and physical response (as in the case of Candy, who is marked as bad to 'protect' other punters). Kerry, however,

provides a 'good' physical response (he says she reaches orgasm), despite the lack of eye contact. Rogerer appears as an equal partner in his reliving of the encounter with Kerry. She has skills and passion, and he displays sexual prowess too. One of the norms of Punternet is that WGs enjoy sex, and so offering them sexual pleasure is reasonable. Rogerer's story appears to be about an encounter which transcends the market as Kerry gets sexual pleasure as well as financial reward. Whilst the good of the encounter is formed through the customer's own pleasure and enjoyment, both Kerry 'the seasoned shag', and other punters whose recommendations have brought Rogerer to see Kerry, are implicated. This transaction counts as successful because, whilst the hierarchies between buyer and seller are clear, the market transaction is somewhat disguised by the claim that both author and WG are ethically good as economic agents and sexual actors.

Concluding discussion

Contingent values of many kinds are stabilised by the calculative device of Punternet which facilitates the indoor commercial sex market. This is possible because commercial sex is located within an established, but changing, discourse of sex and sexuality which naturalises the male 'sex drive', legitimates sexual identities and 'lifestyle' choices and gives the customer precedence in a market-dominated consumer culture. These normalising trends oppose longstanding criticisms of buying and selling sex as morally wrong, as abject. The increasing trend to valorise market exchange (Sandel 2012) seems to trump conflict over the 'moral worth' of prostitution in this case. Punternet is comprised of autobiographical narratives of male customers where authors lay claim to goodness and right to judge. I have argued that Punternet is a calculative device (Callon and Muniesa 2005) which qualifies 'goods' (in this case, women's bodies, personhood and sexual services). Qualification is produced through customer service reviews, where male authors draw on consumer discourses of choice and rights to present themselves and their practices as good, despite the possibilities for others to disagree. When moralising through the market, the 'rightness' of a transaction is a composite of ideas about what a 'paying customer' deserves (given his own standing and the price he pays), what a good worker should be, and what counts as a good performance of sex. Multiple understandings of 'good' are used in this evaluating process. The WG is particularly seen as good when she is professional, when she

responds to criticism, or disguises the transaction through apparently showing her enjoyment. Authors claim their own goodness through offering gifts of pleasure, and by behaving better than other customers. They do this by drawing on the legitimization offered by their status as customer. Conceptualising Punternet as a calculative device offers the advantage of understanding the market for sex as a complex series of interrelated transactions where 'value' is influenced by the moral standing of those involved, in this case tightly connected to the gendered nature of the transactions.

Many recent studies of markets (such as those in Callon, Millo and Muniesa 2007) are of complex financial transactions, or at least of formal economic activity. They are a long way from the bodily exchanges discussed here, where what is bought and sold is access to another person. It seems to me that rescuing markets from economists must involve exploring 'ordinary' actors everyday engagements in the range of markets they encounter, such as the small-scale technologies and commodified bodies that mark (informal) exchanges of personal services (sex, care). Such markets are notable for the complex and sometimes paradoxical interweaving of market and gift exchanges, where gifts of feminised care are worth more in every sense of the term. These ordinary actors use the Punternet device to do the moral work of evaluating, creating norms and codes of practice against which the worth of others is judged .

The interweaving of value, markets and morals discussed here is distinctive to indoor commercial sex, with its specific organisational and legal constitution, its gendering, the particularities of the commodity for sale and the set of interactive web technologies that provide a space for customers to speak. However, that is not to say that the interweaving of market and morality exists only in this context. Comparable judgements are made during other transactions that involve meetings between bodies, judgements which combine and confuse distinctions between person, service and commodity. Other personal service encounters reviewed on the internet and in consumer magazines see reviewers producing judgements about worth and value as well, as do informal conversations where, for example, parents exchange word of mouth recommendations for childcare provision. Market exchanges are marked by many forms of moral talk, and this intercedes in the production of value in ways specific to the commodity at hand. That is, the constituent players in a

transaction - organisations, products, workers, customers, technologies - combine to produce social outcomes which legitimate or condemn behaviours and agents. Not all actors are able to make use of the market devices surrounding transactions to lay claim to a moral order that suits them: in this case the sex workers are under scrutiny and not speaking out. Moral disputations are central to how transactions are conducted, as judgements of goodness and badness influence the smooth operation of exchange and how economic value is determined. This is significant to understandings of markets and the generation of value; it is significant also to making sense of contemporary morality as market rationalities appear to govern all kinds of practices and relationships (Sandel 2012).

Notes

- i Most, though not all, commercial sex encounters involve male customers and female sex workers.
- ii I use the phrases 'working girl' (WG) and punter in discussions of the data, as this are the terms used most often on the site. Elsewhere, I refer to 'sex workers' and customers.
- iii I present only the first field report in full to illustrate how reports look as 'calculative devices'. Elsewhere, I have removed some of the explicit sexual description and details of location where it does not add to the argument.
- iv Although authors have already given themselves pseudonyms, I have changed these, given WGs pseudonyms, and removed other identifying features from the reports, to enhance anonymity. All field reports retain grammar and spelling of original. 'A Levels' refers to anal intercourse; 'CIM' refers to the customer ejaculating into the sex worker's mouth. 'Mish' refers to missionary sexual position.

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