

Students and the Sex Industry

**“Is Financial Hardship
Turning
Students into Sex Workers?”**

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1 Abstract

This study explores the complex issue of whether university students are turning to the sex industry in order to financially support their education, and what factors would be likely to deter or prevent them from doing so. The data provided from semi-structured interviews with Keele University students is analysed in order to provide an understanding of what factors are influential to students' decision-making when economic and moral pressures conflict. The data collected identifies four main independent factors that are influential to these students. The difficulties of surviving financially whilst in full time higher education are also discussed. My analysis indicates that although a small number of students are working in the sex industry, financial hardship is not always the prime motivator. Furthermore, the disparity between prostitution and other roles within the sex industry, and therefore what constitutes sex work, is identified as crucial to understanding what is, and is not, morally acceptable for young people today.

1.1 Acknowledgements

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2 Introduction

Student hardship has been the focus of much attention in recent debates over top-up fees, and class discrimination. At the same time, recent press headlines such as 'Students for Sale' (Nicholson 2002), 'Red Light finds its way on to Campus' (Chapman 2001) and 'Turning Tricks for Tuition' (MacWilliams 2002), have brought the public's attention to an alleged association between student hardship and the sex industry. The dangers of working in the sex industry are well known and it is therefore important to understand what influences are instrumental in promoting, facilitating or deterring certain vulnerable groups from becoming involved in the sex industry. A fuller understanding of the moral dilemmas that students face may indicate an urgent need for additional support, and could therefore be useful to educational policy makers. Furthermore, any additional knowledge relating to conditions for entry into the sex industry may indicate how to best target guidance and support for young people generally. The aim of this study is therefore to establish firstly whether there is any evidence to support the suggestion that university students are turning to the sex industry to support their education and secondly to identify and analyse those factors that influence a student's decision-making when possible solutions to economic challenges conflict with their moral beliefs.

The following chapters will outline how in order to address these questions, I carried out a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews with female students at Keele University. This will include how the study was designed and

conducted and will report how the data gathered make a relevant contribution to an understanding of students and the sex industry. The following paragraphs provide a review of the current literature on the economic motivations for working in the sex industry, particularly those that highlight any associated student hardship in order to outline the context within which this research was inspired.

3 Literature Review

Theoretical understanding of the sex industry has generally related to a specific focus of prostitution. Of the more recent research into prostitution, Phoenix (1999) undertook interviews with, and observation of women in order to understand how women come to 'make sense' of their involvement in prostitution. All her interviewees had experienced poverty, which was often cited as the precipitating cause of their engagement in prostitution:

"It is often thought that having paid employment is one of the primary ways of avoiding poverty. But it has been demonstrated that jobs that are low-paid, have little status or security and/or are organised on a casual or flexible basis are a cause of rather than a guard against poverty."

(Phoenix 1999:76)

Phoenix notes that the majority of people in these types of jobs are women. However it could be added that as they are also typical of the kinds of jobs open to students needing work that fits in with their academic life, Phoenix's observation may therefore be particularly applicable to students.

Similarly, O'Neill (1997) sees prostitution as a response to financial hardship, following her research with prostitutes in Stoke-On-Trent. She stresses the need to be aware of changes in the benefit and welfare system, including student

grants, which increase the risk of more people becoming involved in prostitution. She acknowledges how prostitutes come from all social classes and that some women make independent lifestyle choices due to the realities of economic need, inadequate benefits, and increasing debt.

(O'Neill 1997:27)

American research into the sex industry has highlighted direct connections with students (Weitzer 2000). Although prostitution is the most obvious example of work within the sex industry, pornography, telephone-sex work and exotic dancing also attract women with economic needs. For example, Chapkis undertook in-depth interviews with sex workers, and excerpts of her interviews with lap-dancers include how some began dancing to earn money for education:

"I started graduate school, and I was desperate for money. I knew that a forty-hour week was out of the question, but there weren't that many jobs out there that paid enough to just work part-time. Plus, I didn't want to do serious work and go to school at the same time; it's just too stressful."

(Chapkis 2000:192:Luna)

Weitzer (2000) also describes interviews with 12 female telephone-sex operators. The agency for whom they worked, 'Smart Girls who Like Sex' plays upon the education and intelligence of their operators, including in their advertisement a

young white women holding a telephone in one hand and a book in the other. Interviews focused on why respondents entered telephone-sex work, and they report that most of their respondents had plans to complete college and/or obtain additional degrees (Weitzer 2000:40). Since this agency purposefully tried to recruit smarter, more 'wholesome', girls to fit their public image however, they may not be typical of telephone-sex workers generally.

Kempadoo (1998) also identifies the use of students as sex workers, in her interviews with 'The Exotic Dancers Alliance'. She acknowledges that they were mostly young students or single parents. One interviewee explains:

“ For feminists to say ‘we want to rescue you’ and then send you off to do weaving or arts and crafts is ridiculous. You know, some women may want to be doctors, and are working to pay for their education.”

(Dawn in Kempadoo and Doezema 1998:190)

The distinction between prostitution and the many other roles within the sex industry have also been highlighted. For example, one stripper explains:

“Strippers are performers Since the best strippers can earn up to \$1,000 a night, no one should be surprised that women who are competent, even expert in other fields, choose to dance. I’ve danced alongside Ph.D.

candidates, teachers and law students. Since dancing, with its worker-designed flexible schedule can facilitate the pursuit of other careers, a woman may reasonably opt to exploit her beauty, social skills, and physical strength.

(Nagle 1997:183)

However, for some the distinction is more artificial:

“A lot of women tend to think of themselves as ‘performers’ or ‘entertainers’, and therefore above strippers, But the work comes down to the same thing. And Peep-show workers who provide only a ‘tease’ but no touch are less stigmatised than prostitutes who go all the way.”

(Chapkis 1997:104)

Similarly, Johanna, who worked with mostly young women, some of them students trying to make their way through school, says:

“Prostitution and dancing – a lot of sex work does overlap. The way I perform, in theory, is sex work. It’s an exchange for a sexual act; whether you’re doing lap-dancing or stage performances, prostitution, peep shows, phone-sex – it’s all the same type of activity. And I know a lot of women who are working in the clubs who may not engage in prostitution outside but are required to do female-to-female love acts.”

(Kempadoo and Doezema 1998:188/9)

Moreover, various roles within the sex industry have also been identified as routes into other more serious areas of the sex industry:

"It turned out to be a phone-sex company. I went for an interview and even though it was phone-sex, you had to look good because the company sent custom-posed Polaroid's of the girls to the customers. But the real money was made by the porn stars who worked for the company. I really wanted to make more money so I decided to get into print and video too."

(Kane 1995 in Chapkis 1997:107)

No doubt there are various routes into prostitution, and indeed into sex work generally. In their collection of writings by 38 sex workers however, five of Delacoste and Alexander's (1988) contributors mention an association between entry into sex work and financing their education. Comments such as 'I turned my first trick when I had been in college for a while and my parents couldn't afford to give me money' (Debra p92), and 'I was a college student doing this temporarily' (Gloria p102), 'I stripped once a week while I was getting my bachelor's degree in nursing then I went in to full time movie work immediately after graduation' (Nina p144), suggest that while some women see this work as temporary, for others it becomes a career. Whilst this collection of articles could be criticised for relying on somewhat anecdotal content, by using an anthology of personal writing by

strippers, prostitutes, porn stars, and other sex-industry workers, these academic essays supply enlightening insights on entry in prostitution.

In the UK, McLeod argues that prostitution has a 'pull' factor by holding certain attractions for many women, and is a rational economic act. Although prostitution is seen as a way out of relative poverty, it is not only within the working class population that prostitution is apparent; women of more middle class background tend to cluster in the sauna, hotel and escort trade. One interviewee, Elaine maintains, *'I come from a very respectable family. It's the same with a lot of girls. A lot of them are perfectly decent people who happen to need the money'* (McLeod 1982:29). However, other factors are important in McLeod's findings, such as how a degree of isolation or distance from ones family, including emotional distance is instrumental to some women. Isolation and distance may of course be a pertinent factor to students living away from their families.

Direct links between students and the sex industry have been made in the UK. Research by the university of London suggests:

"A more diverse range of women now work as prostitutes in London, including students, migrants and young women who have suffered substantial cuts in state benefits over the past decade."

(Ward and Day 2001)

This was a longitudinal study, noting changes in prostitution between 1985 and 2000. The Praed Street Project estimated that 3-4% of indebted students turned to the sex industry for additional finance. Manager Jane Ayres reports:

"We've noticed a significant increases in approximately the last three to four years of students who have entered the sex industry with a goal to finance their studies. They have clearly said that changes in the grant system have affected their choice."

(Chapman 2001:20)

Furthermore, this may be an underestimation considering this information comes from patients with concerns for their sexual health, and therefore may be more representative of high-risk 'street' prostitution.

Graham Scambler outlines the dangers of concentrating too closely on street prostitution as stereotypical, which he insists is merely the 'visible tip' of a neglected group of women, many from middle class backgrounds working less conspicuously off the street (Scambler and Scambler 1997:105), such as:

"Sarah, who like Gillian, worked through a London escort agency, seeing one client per week to fund her way through a postgraduate degree in fine arts."

(Scambler and Scambler 1997:114)

Further evidence supporting concerns about students and the sex industry is indicated in the results of research by Roberts and Golding (1999). This survey provided information on the financial circumstances, and drug and alcohol use amongst British University students. A sample of students from two London universities provided 360 participants. One of the items on the questionnaire questioned whether respondents knew of any students who had engaged in drug dealing, prostitution, or crime to help support themselves financially. Thirteen respondents (3.6%) reported knowing someone involved in prostitution. The authors conclude:

“Student’s personal debt was significantly associated with their knowing people involved in prostitution, crime or drug dealing to help support themselves financially.”

(Roberts and Golding 1999:103).

Whilst this study aimed to investigate the effects of economic circumstances on student’s mental and physical health, the relationship with prostitution was significant. What is limiting however is that this approach does not elicit a full understanding of how this knowledge was regarded by respondents, or whether they had ever felt the need to consider prostitution themselves.

It must be noted though, that not all research supports the notion that economic hardship is the determining factor in turning to prostitution. Sharpe (1998), investigating what social factors motivated or facilitated entry into prostitution emphasises that:

“To claim that economics are the primary motivating factors compelling a woman into prostitution ignores the fact that only a tiny proportion of poor women become prostitutes. This study has shown that poverty was not the sole motivating cause”.

(Sharpe 1998:168)

Interestingly, she also reports that of her forty prostitute women interviewed, not one had been educated beyond the age of sixteen. However, again it must be noted that her respondents were all ‘street’ prostitutes; therefore, less obvious areas of the sex industry are excluded. This is particularly important, because not only has demand for commercially available sexual services soared over the last thirty years, but the scope has grown to encompass a wider variety of sexual contacts (Bernstein 2001).

Calhoun et al (1997) researched stripping as a social phenomenon for young people. Studying strippers aged 21-32, they noted that rather than being economically motivated, stripping is typically viewed as a form of recreation or fun,

providing an 'adrenalin rush'. It is also viewed as a form of self-fulfilment, and as a way to use the body to receive attention and boost self-esteem. For instance:

"Oh money, it influences, but you know, it's not a priority. With me it wasn't anyway. With me it was just, I wanted to do it. I wanted to have fun."

(Christie in Calhoun et al 1997:315)

Similarly, Barton (2002) studied American strippers, in order to assess both the benefits and challenges of working as an exotic dancer in the late 1990s. Her findings indicate that money is not the only reason some women enjoy dancing. Many discussed feeling powerful while on stage, with all eyes watching them. 'Most enjoyed the sexual abandon and ego gratification as well' (Barton 2002:590). Barton also notes how many of the dancers were either dancing their way through college, taking a break from college, or supporting themselves after college while they decided what to do with their lives.

There are many references in the current literature to students performing erotic labour of some sort, such as dancing and pornography, as well as overt prostitution, which is not a new phenomenon. In fact in 1957 Davis noted:

“At Everett Junior High it was said that groups of ninth grade boys often deal in narcotics and prostitution, with seventh and eighth grade girls ‘turning tricks’.

(Davis 1957:568)

But for Davis, prostitution is not just about economics, and removing alleged economic causes would not abolish prostitution, because ‘only when the moral condition is assumed, do wages or economic want take on any importance’ (Davis 1957:751). So in other words, economics only become the deciding factor once the moral decision is overcome. Nevertheless, some forty years later, David Barrett, head of social studies at the University of Luton insists:

“Higher education has an insidious new industry developing within it – that of students being involved in prostitution to make ends meet and avoid serious debt.”

(Barrett 1997:14)

Barrett notes however, that our knowledge of the subject is sketchy and that no national study on students and prostitution has ever been undertaken.

The variety of literature does demonstrate though, that not all analyses of motivation for entrance into work in the sex industry cite economics as the indisputable cause, or that changes in economic welfare provision would be the

preventative factor. Therefore, although there has long been evidence of sex workers claiming to be supporting their education, it is important to investigate what social conditions, restraints, pressures, inspirations, and motivations influence students and how students themselves might explain any moral challenges working in the sex industry may pose for them today. The following chapter outlines the methods this study employed in order to gain such an understanding.

4 Research Methods

Employing a qualitative approach, this study used semi-structured interviews incorporating vignettes, with female students from Keele University. The following paragraphs outline how the research problem was addressed.

4.1 Research design

Establishing the criteria for a comprehensive review of the literature was challenging, in that there are an enormous number of articles and books published, both sociologically, and others informed by neighbouring disciplines. Sociologically, prostitution has historically been approached either by functionalists, by feminist theorists, or under the study of deviance. However, in order to examine the relevant context for this study, I deliberately set out to select that literature which highlighted the economic causal arguments for and against prostitution, and to research that incorporated a wider range of roles and occupations within the sex industry.

An association between students and the sex industry was represented consistently, often inadvertently within unrelated contexts. Research such as Roberts and Golding (1999) led me to the recognition though, that whilst survey approaches are useful for measuring the extent or prevalence of an established concept (Blaxter, et al 2002), my aim was more exploratory, and so to elicit a

richer, detailed understanding of the issues, a qualitative study was adopted. However, while unstructured interviews offer greater flexibility and freedom, without a predesigned set of questions, the qualitative interviewer has to be able to think on their feet, as it is all too easy to orchestrate a 'pleasant social' encounter whose content has little bearing on the intellectual puzzle being addressed (Arber in Gilbert 2001:126). Therefore, given my limited interviewing experience and the need to generate relevant data, a semi-structured interview, using a fairly specific topic guide was favoured. This provided a focussed interview, by listing previously identified areas to be covered, while leaving the exact wording and order of the questions open.

Identifying and assessing underlying attitudes, beliefs and values was a fundamental aim in this study, and in order to facilitate this, a small number of vignettes were used to offer a relevant context. Vignettes have primarily been used in quantitative surveys, but more recently they have been used in a small number of qualitative studies (Hughes 1998). Although not a means of predicting what a respondent actually would do in a similar situation (Finch 1987), vignettes do provide an unobtrusive opportunity for respondents to determine at what stage, if at all, they introduce their own experiences, and can de-sensitise certain aspects of potentially difficult topics (Barter and Reynold 1999). The use of vignettes was therefore chosen to facilitate a contextualised framework in which to stimulate and contemplate certain moral dilemmas with the respondents in this study.

4.2 Sampling

A convenience sample of nineteen students was selected for interviewing. These were selected randomly from various university departments. Although some initial contacts were used, snowball sampling was not employed, because my aim was to reach a wider distribution of students and their broader social circles, whereas snowballing techniques may restrict the spread to a more limited range of participants. However, it must be acknowledged that proportionally, over half of the participants were drawn from social science departments. Many others however, were recruited as part of a reciprocal arrangement with students from other disciplines attempting to recruit students for their own research needs.

While it could be argued that convenience sampling is limiting in terms of representativeness (Flick 2002), generalisability was not the goal of this study. The key issue was how to focus, strategically and meaningfully, in order to best address the stated research questions, rather than how to represent (Mason 2002). Only women were therefore recruited, as whilst an association with the sex industry is not exclusively a female phenomenon, proportionately it is far higher in the female population. Similarly, only third-year students were selected because by year three the potential aggregate of accumulated debt is reportedly between £5,000 and £10,000 and dropping out due to financial difficulties is less likely by this stage (Barrett 1997, Roberts and Golding 1999). Furthermore, probability sampling is often unrealistic for small-scale or qualitative research (Gilbert 2001)

and for this study, the representativeness of the sample was less important than the exploration of the more complex and intricate social values being uncovered.

Interviews were carried out during November and December 2003 in private rooms in the university library. To compliment my data set, an interview was also carried out in June 2003 with the Vice President of Education and Welfare Committee of KUSU (Hereafter Amanda VP-EWC), as it was recognised that her experience in this role might add some insight into the kinds of problems that students approach the committee for help with.

4.3 Data Collection

The data collected was in the form of tape-recorded interview transcriptions. Despite the large commitment of time in transcribing, recording allowed me to focus on the interviewee, including non-verbal communication, and it also aided detailed analysis. None of the participants objected to the interview being taped. In order to avoid eliciting glib or easy answers (Gilbert 2001), open questions were mainly used, to encourage interviewees to communicate their underlying attitudes, beliefs and values. Questions included exploring areas such as interviewees' financial pressures, social and work habits, their knowledge of the sex industry, support availability and what beliefs, values and emotions were important to them. A pre-prepared interview guide was utilised, a copy of which is provided as appendix 1. This guide helped me to keep some sense of structure, as did the use of vignettes which were incorporated in two ways: as an opening, thought-

provoking introduction to the topic, then again as part of the closing sequence, thus allowing for comparison having considered the subject more thoroughly. Copies of these vignettes are provided as appendix 2.

4.4 Data Analysis

Having transcribed the taped interviews, I began analysis by reading and rereading all the transcriptions in their entirety in order to get 'a feeling for the whole' (Creswell 1998 cited in Rudestam and Newton 2001). This was followed by coding respondents' answers according to the various experiences reported, and the reasons, values and beliefs that they had stated were important to them. Significant words and statements were highlighted and labelled, and statements that were redundant or overlapped with others were set aside. In order to construct meaning from the data, they were then categorised according to the common principles and experiences established. Simple indexing was not sufficient, as the text often addressed more than one topic or concept at a time, so a fairly complex set of both interrelated and unrelated categories and sub-categories were applied (Mason 2002).

The data was handled manually, resulting in a multitude of strips of labelled paper. Whilst categorising in this manner did result in fragmentation and decontextualisation of the data (Bryman 2001), the advantage was in the way it provided a basis for making comparisons and connections within the data, and for developing arguments or explanations in order to relate them to existing literature.

Furthermore, it provided some sense of objectivity from the data, facilitating a more theoretical analysis.

4.5 Analysis and results of the vignettes

Data produced in response to the vignettes were analysed separately first, the results of which were disappointing. Rather than providing a valuable technique for exploring people's perceptions, and beliefs (Hughes 1998), analysis of the vignette responses indicated little of significance. Furthermore, whilst the subject matter may be sensitive for some, all participants appeared relaxed and open to discussion on all areas of the subject anyway. So whilst vignettes may provide a less personal and therefore less threatening way of exploring sensitive topics (Barter and Renold 1999), this did not appear to be a particularly personal or sensitive subject for these participants. The most useful purpose of the vignettes however was as an effective tool for introducing the many roles within the sex industry, and to encourage participants to think outside the framework of their own lives. In these respects the use of vignettes proved to be an invaluable tool. However, the results did not indicate any particular pattern, neither did they serve to either support or contradict evidence in answer to my research questions. Any significant responses therefore have been incorporated within the findings of the main interview data results and discussion that follows. For reference, statistical analyses of the responses are provided as appendix 3.

5 Results

Having analysed the data, I was able to establish a number of clear themes and concepts into which the data was then categorised. Rather than providing a separate discussion chapter, reflection on the meaning of the data is provided briefly throughout the results section, and more fully in the final summary. Using excerpts from the interview transcriptions, including conflicting examples where appropriate, examples that illustrate the concept or point being made are offered and discussed throughout. One full transcription is provided for reference as appendix 4. To protect the identity of the participants, all example excerpts are identifiable by pseudonym only.

The results and their significance are now broken down into four main sections, followed by a discussion summary. The first section details the four main key factors identified by these participants as having a deterrent, or preventative effect. In the second section, I address whether, and in what way students may be a vulnerable population in terms of recruitment to the sex industry including the difficulties of balancing paid work with academic study. In the third section, participants attitudes towards working in the sex industry and the moral standpoints expressed are reported and discussed, particularly focusing on the differences between various roles or occupations within the sex industry. In the fourth section I present and discuss the results relating to any evidence that students are working in the sex industry. The summary section will then draw together the findings from all four sections, and will be used to discuss how when linked together, they offer a meaningful perspective which will then be used to

address my previously-stated research questions. I also return to the previously discussed literature in order to integrate my results.

5.1 Key preventative factors

5.1.1 Family support

The relevance of close family support was clearly a very pertinent factor for all participants in a number of ways. Firstly, it was suggested that a strong family background would 'condition' beliefs about what is 'acceptable' behaviour. Secondly, if you were close to your parents you would be more likely to discuss problems with them openly. Thirdly, for almost all participants, the risk of hurting or disappointing their parents, would prevent them from taking up work in the sex industry. The following example was a typical response to questions about the importance of family influences:

"It matters because if you were a close-knit family then you would worry about what they're going to say. You'd also be more likely to go to them with problems. So without that you'd be more vulnerable, because there would be nobody to hurt or disappoint."

(Louise)

The points raised were that a close family would have a protective influence, as people wouldn't want to disappoint their parents, and some felt that their parents would be likely to blame themselves; they would question where *they* had gone wrong. However, parental disapproval of working in the sex industry is not

necessarily straightforward, but may depend on the nature of the work involved.

For instance:

“ If I were to say I was lap-dancing for instance, she (Her Mother) wouldn’t have a huge issue with it. She’s quite open-minded.”

(Nicola)

Overall though, family closeness, support, and potential disapproval were seen as being very influential in all students’ decision-making processes. Although families were the most commonly reported influence, another key influencer was romantic association.

5.1.2 Boyfriends

A much-mentioned preventative factor cited by many participants was their personal relationship status. Sixteen of the nineteen participants reported that having a boyfriend would be a preventative factor for them, in that having a boyfriend would either mean that working in the sex industry would be out of the question, or that they would need to seek any boyfriend’s approval. For example:

“ Having a boyfriend is important for me; I would have to ask him if it was something I wanted to do. If he didn’t want me to then I would probably respect his decision, because you know, we’re together, we’re a partnership, and me going off doing that, especially if it

meant sleeping with other people, that would upset him so I wouldn't do it."

(Nicola)

Similarly:

"Oh God yes, boyfriends would, I think that would influence most people. I did have a boyfriend, and I couldn't have done it then. People I know would consider it cheating on them."

(Anna)

The indication here is that for some it is not only the morals of working in the sex industry that are being challenged, but also the immorality of being unfaithful. Only three participants rejected it as irrelevant for them, asserting that any decision regarding such matters would be at a fundamentally personal level. For example:

" I don't think it would really, if you have pride in yourself, then it wouldn't matter, it's not about cheating as such, it's more than that, and I think the decision is more about self-respect, not about boyfriends stopping you."

(Ruth)

What this suggests, is that while for some any decision regarding potentially working in the sex industry would be a personal decision first and foremost, for

many more, boyfriends do matter, and so this would therefore be an important preventative factor for them.

5.1.3 Personal confidence

This was an unanticipated issue that emerged very early on in these interviews. Many participants raised the subject of self-confidence in one form or another, as an attribute that would be a prerequisite for working in the sex industry. This was sometimes with reference to courage or guts, but sometimes also in terms of physical personal attributes, such as 'I would do glamour modelling if I had the assets' (Nicola, pointing and laughing at her own figure). These personal issues were articulated much more descriptively and vividly than were those that referred to the moral issues. Self-confidence and sexual competence were mentioned not in response to a particular question, but volunteered indirectly by 16 different participants. The following are typical examples:

“ I just wouldn't have the confidence, and you'd have to feel really good about your body I should think. I couldn't dance like that, and I could never do what a prostitute does, in fact I'm not sure I know what that is, so you'd have to have the confidence you know, personally I mean.”

(Lisa)

“It takes a lot of courage, having people gawping at your body. I dread going to the beach on holiday as it is, and you’d have to always think about how your body looks. I mean I know I’m not fat, but I’m still always on diets, so to have to expose yourself in that way, God no!”

(Emily)

Many held the view that it was all about body image and having the confidence to carry sexual performances off. Some said they might do it if it weren’t for their small breasts, or excess weight, or that they were not confident that they would know how to satisfy clients. The inference is that it is not only whether participants would or wouldn’t, or should or shouldn’t do it, but more that they were not sure that they had what it takes to do it successfully. Therefore notions of modesty, having a negative body image and lacking confidence both in terms of sexual experience and in being able to ‘carry it off’ are themselves what makes the idea inconceivable for many. Thus these can be very significant preventative factors.

5.1.4 Lack of knowledge

For most participants, even if they had no moral issue with working in the sex industry, they would not have sufficient knowledge of how to gain access to recruitment. Only one of the nineteen participants expressed that they would know how to go about finding work in the sex industry (Becky). The others however were far from confident about this prospect, and suggested therefore that this would be a barrier for them:

"I think at first it would have to be a door that was opened for them. Most people wouldn't even give it a thought, but if they knew someone who did, that would make a difference. Not knowing would not only make it difficult to find work, but also there wouldn't be the idea in the first place."

(Frances)

For all but one student then, a lack of knowledge represents a preventative factor, in that this not only means that they would be prevented by a lack of access to the industry without prior personal contacts, but that it would only become a potential option for them if they knew someone participating already, because otherwise it would not even cross their minds. Most participants felt that having a 'contact' would therefore be necessary, and several added comments that suggested that the less they knew, the less risk there was of them ever considering working in the sex industry, so in this sense ignorance is considered a protective 'bliss'.

In summary then, the four key preventative factors cited were strong family support, romantic commitments, body image/confidence issues, and a lack of knowledge about the sex industry. Significantly, although financial support was sometimes intertwined with emotional support from families, the absence of

financial constraints was nevertheless not expressed as an independent key factor for these participants.

5.2 Students as a vulnerable population

Questions were posed in a variety of forms about whether, and if so why, students might be vulnerable to being recruited into the sex industry. The most commonly reported issues were those of anonymity and freedom from familial/communal supervision. For example:

“I can see why, because being away from home would make it more likely, because well, your family wouldn’t find out. You can do things you wouldn’t dare to do at home”

(Sarah).

“At home, it seems like in your hometown with the people you’ve grown up with, you know everybody, so you wouldn’t risk it. But when you go away to university you don’t have anybody watching over you.”

(Ruth)

Few responses focused on economic hardship, which when mentioned was couched in terms such as ‘I suppose’, ‘I assume’ or ‘perhaps’. This suggested that rather than being their personal or ardent view, this was more the ‘expected’,

‘acceptable’ one. Almost without exception, participants reported that newfound independence from parents, and a sense of anonymity afforded by being away from their hometowns were far more relevant factors. Some expressed that going away to university had been liberating for them in many ways, including more sexual freedom. However, many participants also pointed out that Keele was different from many other universities, both by being a small campus-based University, and because of its semi-rural location. Again, clearly the main concern expressed was that of being ‘found out’. For example:

“But in a city university it would be more likely, because Keele is such a close community. You might be lap-dancing in a club and see a lecturer in the audience, - God, no - you couldn’t do it somewhere like this.”

(Jennifer)

Of course one of the assumption underlying press allegations that students are turning to the sex industry is that they are vulnerable as a result of student financial hardship. Although a small number of participants did talk of how hard it might be for some, many more were scathing about the whole idea, and some went as far as suggesting it was nothing more than media-hype and propaganda. The following examples were usually in response to questions about what level of hardship participants saw around them at Keele. I have selected more excerpts here deliberately, because the points being made are central to the argument I am

presenting, and were made very clearly and unambiguously by almost all of the participants:

“ Oh no, it’s probably you know, just a big overdraft, but not enough to get stressed out over. And students are all broke really, we’re all in the same boat, and it’s not what I’d call poverty, just student-type broke. A few have their overdrafts up to the limit, but most leave room for going out and emergencies.”

(Lisa)

“ Well, the people I know, really, put it this way, people are not laying awake at night worrying about it. I know I can’t afford to go out every night, though sometimes the weekends do seem to get longer and longer, Thursday to Tuesday sometimes, so we do go out a lot.”

(Anna)

“Well I think maybe there could be a few that are that broke, but I think the press have a tendency to sensationalise things. You’d think from the headlines and stuff that we were all destitute, and we’re not, it’s not that bad for most of us.”

(Sarah)

“I don’t think students worry about paying their debts back, so I find it interesting that people are so concerned about how much debt

everybody has. I don't think students do worry about it that much, I think it's a political campaign, propaganda, and only then do students pick up on it and worry, 'Oh maybe this is a bad thing', you know. We have immediate money needs, you know for a social life and that, but we don't have to worry about debts really. It's just a media thing, not what students feel."

(Angela)

So the common perception of student hardship, possibly fuelled by media hype, may be misleading according to these participants. While a small number reported that it can be quite difficult, most students talked about it being more a case of not being able to go out all the time, or having to rely on overdrafts, credit cards and parents, but that students were not concerned about it. The vast majority insisted that the image of the 'poor penniless student' was far removed from their reality. Furthermore, for these participants, the level of hardship that does exist is not stressful because students are *supposed* to be broke; it's 'all part of the package', and we are 'all in the same boat'. It is a level of hardship that forces decisions about 'which nights to go out' or 'whether to stick to the union bar'. In other words it is about managing on a budget rather than poverty in any true sense of the word, relative or absolute. As several participants explained, it is just a 'student-type' broke.

The refreshing thing for me, was that these students themselves were not trying to disguise this reality, they were open and frank about their level of hardship, and whilst many acknowledged that yes, there may be the exceptions 'out there', no one could actually identify any. Furthermore, the level of hardship was born out by responses to questions about how students balance paid work with academic studies. The examples were generally in response to questions about how much and what sort of paid work they and their friends do in year three. The results indicated overwhelmingly that very few students work in their final year, therefore few could comment of having to cope with balancing paid work with studying. For example:

"No, it's hard to find jobs that allow for study time. Like I knew somebody who had a job, but she kept missing classes, and in the end she had to pack it in. I know a few people that have tried to do it, but it doesn't work."

(Rachel).

"Yes, I had to last year to have a social life, just a couple of nights a week in a bar, and my other friends don't work. I'm living off my parents a bit as well really, it's the only way, they don't want me getting credit cards you see, they'd rather I use their money, so Dad gave me a card on his account to use instead."

(Nicola)

In summary, very few students reported that they or their friends work during term time in their third year, and those that do work generally do so to fund their social life. The question of how third-year students balanced both paid work and academic work then, was that for the most part that they don't have to. Whatever the difficulties of working alongside academic study, few could comment, as work was neither possible, nor necessary.

5.3 Moral attitudes towards the sex industry

As described in section 5.2, many participants reported that the anonymity afforded by living away from home was a key factor for them, because there was less chance of being 'caught'. This of course raises the question of why being exposed would be quite such a fearful prospect. To gain an understanding of this, participants were asked about how they would react to the knowledge of a fellow student working in the sex industry. Over half (13 out of 19) reported that they did or would have negative reactions. However, no specific role within the industry was mentioned, therefore participants could apply the question equally to lap-dancing as to street prostitution.

This is key to understanding the way these students made sense of the sex industry. Repeatedly, participants were keen to qualify whether they or I were referring to prostitution or not. Only three participants expressed the opinion that all roles within the sex industry were morally unacceptable, such as: *'it is always about women's bodies being sold for a price'* (Nina). And,

"I think working in any way, in this sort of thing, you are damaging yourself. Street prostitution is the worst, but it's all so 'not-healthy.'"

(Angela)

The majority however, differentiated between the various roles, and were often adamant that this distinction must be made clear. Most thought telephone-sex work was harmless, whereas prostitution was far more complex morally. The point of departure tended to lie at the point where direct physical interaction with clients was involved. The contested areas therefore for many were pornography and lap-dancing, though many recognised that lap-dancing usually involves physical contact to some extent. Furthermore some were sceptical about whether 'dancing' was just a euphemism for prostitution anyway. Either way, the *physical* sexual act was what made other roles unacceptable to the majority, and lap-dancing was therefore still far easier to justify than prostitution:

"Lap-dancing seems recently to have got a bit more respectful, you know, there's a lot of lap dancers who say 'it's just dancing', 'we don't have sex with them' and I'm sure there's a lot who don't have sex with them, though there's some who do I guess."

(Anna)

"Yes, there is a difference; I think there's a total difference. I feel that you've got people like a lap-dancer; someone that stops there at that point is fine. I think stepping over the mark into prostitution is a total

other matter completely, to be quiet honest. There is a definite difference, and I think that's the problem with a lot of people's views about it."

(Becky)

"I think it's different with the lap-dancing. Although it can go wrong, and of course people may recognise you, but then it's only dancing really, and I was reading an article in a magazine last week that was saying that now it's the latest way of getting fit, because apparently you burn up a hell of a lot of calories dancing about like that."

(Louise)

Although most of the participants did see 'difference', the questions asked were about the moral difference, whereas the responses tended to be framed in more practical and pragmatic terms. Many references were made to risk factors such as exposure through being recognised, or to the health risks, rather than to any potential moral dangers or dilemmas. Many made reference to the fact that lap-dancing was 'popular' and 'becoming respectable now'. The lesser stigma attached to lap-dancing as it grew in popularity and respectability was noted by several participants.

The other significant factor though, is that for many being involved in one role is not the end of it, but merely the first step in a 'rocky road downwards' (Helen). Not all felt this way, for instance:

"They're doing it just to live on, they're not planning to do it forever, they're just using it, it's not a career choice."

(Joanne)

Nevertheless, the common perception was that one thing leads to another, and that you would come to depend on the high earnings. The following quotations were not the response to any specific questions, but were incidental within other contexts:

"You see once you start work in the sex industry, you would become used to it and accept it more and get greedy. It would be hard to get out."

(Frances)

"Once you've overcome the moral barrier in some way, after that there's nothing to stand in your way and you do one, then someone mentions the next thing. You'd know what you were doing by then, and you'd know the right people."

(Emily)

While two of the nineteen participants felt that it can just be a temporary, safe option, most recognised that there is a risk in getting involved in any way. There were two elements to this. One is that you get used to the money - you get greedy. The other is that once you make the connections the door is opened to other possibilities, so there is the danger that any entrance to the sex industry is dangerous and could lead to either greed that cannot be satisfied legitimately, or an escalation in terms of the roles and their associated risks and dangers.

5.4 Students in the sex industry

Not one of the nineteen participants indicated an awareness of any other student at Keele or any other university working as a prostitute. However, as the discussion broadened to include other forms of work in the sex industry, positive results were far more varied. Three separate participants indicated knowledge of five individual current Keele students who were cited as working or having worked in other areas of the sex industry. That is, three students were cited as working in glamour modelling/pornography and a further two were lap-dancing. In addition to this, a further three participants had knowledge of student friends at other universities who did exotic dancing / stripping, and pornographic modelling.

“Oh yeah, I do know a student in pornography, in fact her boyfriend does it too, and he’s just gone off to Denmark to do a film, but to be fair, knowing them, I don’t know if it is to finance their studies. I mean he’s a funny one anyway, and there may be other reason’s

why they do it in the first place but, that's how they met, then he transferred here, from Durham I think."

(Amanda – VP-EWC)

"I've actually got a friend who works as a lap-dancer, well two girls I know really."

(Becky)

"I mean I have a friend, a student here, who last year, well she was getting herself into debt so she did some topless modelling. For magazines, not to be used in this country, so obviously they wouldn't be seen by anybody she knew, ones that were to be sold in Europe etc

(Joanne)

Additionally, two of the nineteen interviewees were or had in the past considered either glamour modelling or lap-dancing themselves:

" I'm trying to get into topless modelling, you know, just soft porn stuff, and I sent some photographs off last week to this company on the Internet. It's no different to going down the beach, and as for lap-dancing, even in a normal bar they want you to wear crop-tops and short skirts, so its not so different, yeh, I'd do it but I wouldn't do anything more than that."

(Anna)

“In fact its something I’ve considered myself, but never actually . . . “

(Nicola)

Those that knew someone working in the sex industry tended to report it in a way that suggested that it wasn’t viewed with great disapproval or moral judgement, in fact generally, they were both nonchalant and quick to defend those cited as ‘only’ doing whatever activity they did, and that it was ‘no big deal’. This suggests that rather than a big revelation or confession, it was considered quite acceptable. For example, although Amanda (VP-EWC), had expressed an awareness of Keele students lap-dancing, she had not realized that pornographic work was even relevant to the subject of working in the sex industry. Similarly, participant Joanne whose Keele student friend did ‘topless’ modelling explained, ‘I wouldn’t classify that as the sex industry really, personally, thought it’s getting fairly close towards It’ (Joanne). So there is a need to be clear about what counts as the ‘sex industry’ and how the sex industry is conceptualised. By recognising the disparity between the various roles, participants could then separate them out and re-categorise those such as lap-dancing and glamour modelling as legitimate or even socially acceptable, activities.

6 Discussion summary

The findings indicate a number of issues that are inconsistent with suggestions of students turning to the sex industry to financially support their education. Firstly, these students, and those whom they were familiar with were not suffering from a level of poverty sufficient to drive them to have to make moral decisions about what lengths they are prepared to go to. Not only are they surviving with relative confidence, they all receive substantial help from their families, and those few that choose to work do so in order to fund a more active social life. This is in direct contrast with the findings of both Day and Ward (2001) and Chapman (2001), although this may in part indicate that the level of economic hardship in large cities where the cost of living is commonly higher, may lead to more severe economic strain for students.

Secondly, the factors that students cite as those that act as **preventative factors** are not financial, but are about family support, boyfriends, body image/confidence, and a lack of knowledge about the sex industry. Participants would be keen to avoid disappointing or hurting their parents, especially as their parents might blame themselves. Romantic relationships would mean that any partner's approval would have to be sought and working in the sex industry would challenge notions of faithfulness. Feeling good about one's personal appearance and having the necessary knowledge and confidence to perform within the sex industry were crucial factors for a great many, and for them this raised the question of not only should they do it, but whether they had the necessary personal attributes. But for

almost all of these nineteen participants, even if they had no family to disappoint, were unattached romantically and had all the necessary attributes, a lack of knowledge about how to become involved in the sex industry would prevent them from taking it any further.

Thirdly, students are working in various forms within the more broad realms of the sex industry; however, there is no evidence here that they are turning to prostitution, which most participants viewed as an entirely different role with far more negative connotations. Lap-dancing and 'soft' pornography at least, are considered to be quite different from prostitution, and invoked far fewer moral protestations. Becky's friends who lap dance for instance, 'almost treat it as much a fun night out as a job really'. Statements that likened glamour modelling to baring all for the beach, and those that recognised lap-dancing as a fashionable form of exercise were not uncommon, and gave the impression that for many of these participants, 'sex work' was not a wholly fitting label for these activities. This indicates that for these participants, these roles are seen as just a 'performance' or 'act' in the way that Nagle's (1997:183) stripper identifies. As the work is less stigmatised than prostitution, rather than seeing it as 'all coming down to the same thing' such as noted by Chapkis (1997:104), the distinction is not viewed as artificial by these participants, rather it represents a defining line between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Many stressed that it is more respectable now, which reinforces Calhoun's point that unlike male strippers who

endeavour to justify their behaviour, female strippers attempt to reduce the stigma surrounding the occupation (Calhoun et al 1998:305).

However, many participants did recognise both that a lot of sex work does 'overlap' (Kempadoo and Doezema 1998:189), and that while activities such as glamour modelling and lap-dancing are not necessarily morally contentious in themselves, involvement in such roles can be both hard to limit temporally, and can also act as a precursor to prostitution. This reinforces the comments made by contributors to Delacoste and Alexander's (1988) anthology that there can be a natural progression within the sex industry, and that this may result in permanent and/or more serious involvement in the sex industry.

The lack of anonymity and opportunity at Keele was a point made by many participants. This suggests that students would be at higher *risk* of recruitment to the sex industry at a larger, metropolitan university. Furthermore, attending such a university may attract higher living costs and subsequently more financial pressures. Even so, Amanda (VP-EWC) confirmed that 'it is definitely not uncommon for Keele students to work at clubs like ST1's' (a strip club in Stoke-on-Trent), and that 'it used to be a big problem about five years ago, when quite a lot of Keele students found themselves getting into the sex industry'. In other words, whether there is any truth in any rumours or not, as Davis (1957) indicated, there may have long been a small number of students who have chosen to work

in the sex industry. However, this has previously not attracted academic interest as confirmed by the absence of research noted by Barrett (1997).

The results of this study reflect Sharpe's (1998) claim that economic factors are not always the primary motive for entry into prostitution. While Sharpe questions why this assumption fails to explain why only a tiny proportion of poor women become prostitutes, I would add that the same assumption similarly fails to explain why, in the absence of dire economic hardship, some young women do nevertheless choose to work in the sex industry.

Whilst the findings from this study are not representative of Keele students, let alone British students generally, they do offer an insight into some aspects of both student financial hardship and how students understand the sex industry. The interpretations I have made *are not necessarily the only interpretation* that could be made from the data produced by this study. However, the consistency of their responses, the weight participants gave to their reasoning and the passion with which they were articulated has directed me towards a number of conclusions.

7 Conclusions

Press allegations that students are turning to the sex industry as a result of financial hardship are misleading and over-simplified. The fact that students are involved in the sex industry is not an issue that this study seeks to challenge, because even in a university that probably offers less opportunity in comparison to that of a larger, city-based university, some students, at least, are indeed working in the sex industry, though this in itself may be nothing new. What my findings do challenge however is the notion that financial hardship is the key motivation and that this is due to recent changes in policy changes or reduced student funding.

Claims of student hardship serve well certain public debates, such as those against the currently controversial proposal for top-up fees; and any press allegations must be understood with these current political contentions in mind. This study indicates that although a small number of students are working in the sex industry, **financial hardship is not always the prime motivator**. There is nothing to indicate that this is either a new or a growing problem, but what may be changing is young people's perception and recognition of what constitutes the sex industry. For example, a more contemporary understanding of what is recognised as 'sex work' may not include roles that historically have attracted the same level of stigma and public disapproval. This reinforces what Weitzer (2000:3) refers to as how 'the *intrinsic* nature of sex work clashes with the reality of *variations* in sex work' (emphasis in original) (Weitzer 2000:36). This variation in the realities of sex work includes differences not only in the physical activities that particular

occupation involves, but also in the realities of the stigma and public image that surrounds that particular role.

The occupations most commonly undertaken by students were glamour modelling and lap-dancing. These roles were not considered morally objectionable in the way that prostitution is for some, and are also considered safer in terms of personal safety and health risks. Moreover, in light of the way roles such as lap-dancing have a more respectable reputation and less 'sleazy' image nowadays, working in them has become far less stigmatizing. Similarly, glamour modelling is not only safer due to the lack of physical contact, but is easy to dismiss as 'no big deal'. It may be that this is as a result of a cultural shift in attitudes towards certain aspects of the sex industry, and how many are taking a very 'modern' view on what is morally acceptable behaviour. In an increasingly open-minded, progressive and tolerant society, some roles within the sex industry are becoming more acceptable, fashionable, and even popular for young people today. Recognizing the disparity between prostitution and other roles within the sex industry, and therefore what constitutes sex work, is therefore critical.

The dangers of working in the sex industry are well known, and whilst bodies can be 'utilised as sites of personal expression' (Calhoun 1998:307) or just as a way of having fun, they can also be exploited. If we are to gain a better understanding of the sex industry, and how to best protect vulnerable groups from recruitment into it, then a more comprehensive understanding of cultural attitudes towards the

more 'fashionable' areas of the sex industry would be valuable. Moreover, if roles such as glamour modelling and lap-dancing can become routes into prostitution, further insight into the specific **career paths** of female prostitutes is needed. In the meantime, perhaps the kind of national study on students and prostitution that Barrett (1997) rightly notes is missing would help identify whether there is any cause for concern. Any such survey however, would need to allow students to differentiate clearly between the diverse roles and occupations that the sex industry encompasses, as well as the relationship between these roles and prostitution to be either meaningful or worthwhile.

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Appendix 1

Interview Schedule - Topic Guide

Knowledge of Keele

Awareness of the current allegations and have they seen or heard any evidence that supports such a claim (Selves or others known to them)?

How do they/would they feel if they became aware of a fellow student participating in the sex industry?

Have they heard of anyone lap-dancing for instance at ST1s?

What further conclusions would they draw/sympathy/empathy

Students in particular

Why might a student be vulnerable?

How difficult is it to survive financially as a student?

Pressures to maintain social life

Other pressures such as fashion etc

How many/few 3rd years work?

How does paid work impact on them?

Do they have time for voluntary work to develop relevant work experience?

What other opportunities are open to them?

How relevant is geographic distance?

Have they ever been targeted for recruitment by local massage parlours or in any other way?

Are particular groups of students vulnerable ie foreign students or students from particular disciplines? Why?

The Sex Industry

Under what circumstances would work in the sex industry be acceptable (if any)?
i.e. is work in the sex industry morally wrong?

If they were in a financial predicament would any forms of work in the sex industry be acceptable?

Have their attitudes changed at any time and if so why?

Roles within the industry - How do they rate various activities for example is telephone-sex better than lap-dancing, is prostitution the lowest kind of work or are they all seen in the same way?

The law and prostitution (if likely to have opinion)

Preventative factors

Working in the sex industry supposedly generates brilliant financial opportunities for minimal time. Why, in their opinion, don't more students take up this kind of work?

What factors are important when weighing the pros and cons of taking up work in the sex industry? Beliefs/values/emotions.

Related stigma – is there shame attached to the sex industry?

How important are family influences? How relevant is closeness of family?

How would family react to such a dilemma and how would that influence respondent's decision? How relevant is emotional distance?

What about personal relationships, boyfriends etc?

How much is known about the sex industry and how to get into it?

What (if any) other factors would they consider relevant to the subject of either

a) Student hardship

B) The sex industry?

Appendix 2

Vignettes

Vignette One (at start of interview)

Carole is coming to the end of her second year at university. She has accumulated over £6,000 in credit card debts, and has maximised her overdraft as well as having used her student loan. She doesn't want to worry her parents with her problem, but knows that she will not be able to manage her final year without extra finance. Her part-time job at a local call centre already means that she struggles with her course work.

A friend, Helen, hints that there is much more money to be earned by using her telephone skills as a telephone-sex worker. Helen invites her to come along to see how easy it is to make a week's wages in just two hours. Should she:

- a) Ask her family for additional support.
- b) Decline and carrying on as she is, increasing her debt further.
- c) Go to find out more about the telephone-sex work.

Vignette Two (at start of interview)

Carole decides to approach her family, but learns that her father has just been made redundant, and that they are at risk of losing their family home. Her parents also inform her that her younger sister will not be joining her at university as planned, because they now cannot afford another lot of course fees.

Meanwhile, her friend Helen has found that her income as a telephone-sex worker has allowed her to reduce her working hours to one night per week, and has not only given her funds to buy lots of new books, but also allows time for both study time and a more active social life. She persuades Carole to come with her one evening, and Carole decides to give it a go.

Several of her new colleagues also work in the local lap-dancing club at the weekends, and boast of earnings in excess of £200 per night. Carole goes to watch one night, and is surprised by how easy it looks. If she could earn this kind of money, she could afford to help her parents and younger sister. Should she:

- a) Give up and return home to help her family by getting a regular job.
- b) Carry on as she is (ie doing the telephone-sex work), just to get through her course.
- c) Take up lap-dancing in order to send money home.

Vignette Three (At or near the end of the interview)

Karen is in her final year at university and is struggling financially. She already works in a pub 4 nights a week, leaving little time for course work, never mind a social life. She has accumulated a lot of credit card debt and her creditors are closing in on her, threatening action. Karen's father died some years ago, and as her mother has acted as guarantor for one of her largest debts, Karen is worried that they will soon contact her mother in order to recover it. Her mother is suffering from depression, so Karen is determined to avoid causing her further anxiety

A local 'massage' parlour is advertising recruitment indicating '*no experience necessary*' and '*fantastic earnings*' for 'being nice' to their 'discernable clients'. She considers how this would allow her a short-term fix; one or two months should do it Should she:

- a) Talk to her mother about her predicament anyway.
- b) Request a year out from her university course.
- c) Take up work in the massage parlour.

Vignette Four (At or near the end of the interview)

Karen decides to go to the massage parlour. Three months later, her debts are now under control, but she continues to work at weekends, as this leaves her weekday evenings free to study. She can also now afford to run a car, allowing her to get home to visit her mother more often.

A friend of hers, Jackie, is about to drop out for financial reasons, only one semester short of graduating. As the university and her family have both been unable to help, she comes to Karen to ask her if she can lend her some money to see her through. Should Karen:

- a) Advise Jackie to go home and get a job
- b) Take on more work at the massage parlour in order to lend her friend the money she needs.
- c) Suggest Jackie considers working at the massage parlour herself.

Appendix 3

Vignettes Analysis

Vignette One

(A=13) (B=1) (C=8)

Angela = a
Rachel = c
Sarah = a
Jennifer = a
Joanne = a
Frances = a
Lisa = c
Nicola = c
Kim = a
Emily = a
Carla = a
Louise = c
Ruth = a
Helen = a
Anna = a/c
Carole = a
Becky = a/c
Nina = a
Janine = c

Vignette two

(A=nil) (B=17) (C=2)

Angela = b
Rachel = b
Sarah = c
Jennifer = b
Joanne = b
Frances = b
Lisa = b
Nicola = c
Kim = b
Emily = b
Carla = b
Louise = b
Ruth = b
Helen = b
Anna = b
Carole = b
Becky = b
Nina = b
Janine = b

Vignette Three

(A=7) (B=4) (C=9)

Angela = a/b
Rachel = a
Sarah = a
Jennifer = a
Joanne = c
Frances = c
Lisa = a
Nicola = c
Kim = c
Emily = c
Carla = c
Louise = b
Ruth = a
Helen = c
Carole = c
Anna = c
Becky = a
Nina = b
Janine = b

Vignette Four

(A=3) (B=nil) (C=15)
+ One 'none acceptable (Angela)'.

Angela = none
Rachel = a
Sarah = c
Jennifer = c
Joanne = c
Frances = a
Lisa = c
Nicola = c
Kim = c
Emily = c
Carla = c
Louise = c
Ruth = c
Helen = c
Carole = c
Anna = c
Becky = c
Nina = a
Janine = c

Appendix 4

Full Transcription

Participant 'Becky'

(Following introduction to research and explanation of vignettes).

Vignette one

Carole is coming to the end of her second year at university. She has accumulated over £6,000 in credit card debts, and has maximised her overdraft as well as having used her student loan. She doesn't want to worry her parents with her problem, but knows that she will not be able to manage her final year without extra finance. Her part-time job at a local call centre already means that she struggles with her course work.

A friend, Helen, hints that there is much more money to be earned by using her telephone skills as a telephone-sex worker. Helen invites her to come along to see how easy it is to make a week's wages in just two hours. Should she:

- a) Ask her family for additional support.
- b) Decline and risk carrying on as she is.
- c) Go to find out more about the telephone-sex work.

Becky: I would say ask her family for additional support, and then, if not, yeh - go for it.

Vignette two

Carole decides to approach her family, but learns that her father has just been made redundant, and that they are at risk of losing their family home. Her parents also inform her that her younger sister will not be joining her at university as planned, because they now cannot afford another lot of course fees.

Meanwhile, her friend Helen has found that her income as a telephone-sex worker has allowed her to reduce her working hours to one night per week, and has not only given her funds to buy lots of new books, but also allows time for both study time and a more active social life. She persuades Carole to come with her one evening, and Carole decides to give it a go.

Several of her new colleagues also work in the local lap-dancing club at the weekends, and boast of earnings in excess of £200 per night. Carole goes to watch one night, and is surprised by how easy it looks. If she could earn this kind of money, she could afford to help her parents and younger sister. Should she:

- a) Give up and return home to help her family by getting a regular job.
- b) Carry on as she is (ie doing the telephone-sex work), just to get through her course.
- c) Take up lap-dancing in order to send money home.

Becky: It depends really; I would go for B, just carry as she is doing the phone-sex. However, if she needed to, why not take up the lap-dancing? I wouldn't have any problem with it. I don't see why, if she needs the money. But carry on, as she is if she can.

SJ Ok. Well one of the purposes of the vignettes, is that they help to illustrate how people can get themselves into various situations, and it can raise certain issues. Also, they highlight the different roles within the industry. The press headlines I showed you, so they surprise you at all?

Becky: No, not really. I've actually got a friend who works as a lap-dancer, well two girls I know really.

SJ: At this university?

Becky: Yeh. She works at ST1's. So does another girl I know, I know them through Keele ***** club. (See Note 1.)

SJ: And what are your thoughts about what they do?

Becky: It doesn't bother me in the slightest; I think it's perfectly fine, I think there's too much fuss in the media about it all.

SJ: Would you ever consider it yourself?

Becky: I wouldn't, no, only because I don't want to. I have enough money, if I didn't I would contemplate doing it. I don't have a problem with it. A couple of others work behind the bar there as well, it's just a job really.

SJ: So does it make you think any differently about anybody, the fact that they lap dance?

Becky: No, not at all.

SJ: Do you know how they feel about it, your friends?

Becky: It's just a job to them really, I see them at ***** practice, and they seem to think they're fine, it's not an issue for them, and we don't even talk about it that much - it's just what they do. They almost treat it as much a fun night out as a job really. I think they do quite well down there, there's quite a family atmosphere. They just get on with it.

SJ: Have you been there yourself?

Becky: No, well not to that one, but there's another club in Blackpool that's associated with ST1's, and one of the girls works there when she goes home sometimes, and we all went there with her one night – not when she was working, just a night out. Same sort of club though. It's not that bad actually, I mean it's not

all women; they've got male dancers too. So I don't have a problem with it, and I'm sure they don't, not for the money they're earning. They're quite cool about it.

SJ: You know this thing about student debt, and what students will or won't do for money, you say you don't need to, but how vulnerable do you think students are generally, from what you see around you?

Becky: I expect they can be, but to be quite honest, what I've noticed really at university, I think I'm quite fortunate in the respect that, well maybe I'm lucky, but I've never found a student that's needed money that badly. I've always known people that need the money to socialise, like the friends at ST1's they go out a lot on what they earn. They don't need the money to live on. One of the girls that does it, her father's a night club owner, so she just does it because she's always been in those circles, and her dad's always owned a night club, and she just sees it as something that's socially acceptable now. Her parents think it's perfectly fine.

SJ: Right, it's no big deal for them. But how hard up are students, how difficult is it to manage financially?

Becky: I don't know, I think it depends totally on how much your parents do for you. I mean if you have financial backing from your parents, middle-class families that come from backgrounds that mean they can get their children through university, but for a working class family, it must be much harder I suppose. They can go to university more easily now, with funding and that, but I think that it's difficult because if you think to yourself that you're going through the student loan process, you need extra support, so you're means-tested on your mother and father's income, which should be irrelevant really, because if they decide not to support you, it's immaterial how much they earn. So you are still in the same situation as everybody else, but you've got the added pressure and responsibility, they've taken away your chances of extra support from the government. It's quite a lot if you think about it, about £50 per week, so that's not really fair.

SJ: So the difference is whether they get their parents support, regardless of the family income coming in, they can be worse off than someone from a working-class background who would get the government support through means-testing?

Becky: Yeh, the middle class can be worse off by miles, it depends on how that money's spent.

SJ: And do you know anybody that's happened to?

Becky: No, because all my friends do get support from their families anyway.

SJ: Do you see much hardship among other students?

Becky: I think it probably can be quite difficult, because I think in my first year there was a girl who struggled quite a bit, with actual living costs, you know, actual basics of living, but I think sometimes it's self-induced by students. If you don't

plan your money out for the whole year, and don't allow yourself a set amount of money, then, and in the first week you go bananas, then by the last week you've got nothing, I think that's how it often works out, so I haven't really noticed any sort of real hardship. But then perhaps I probably haven't always had my eyes open, you know, since I've been here. Not in that sort of respect really.

SJ: Of course students are often away from home for the first time, too, aren't they? How much do you think this could add to their vulnerability?

Becky: I suppose it does really, it does give them a lot of freedom, but I think by the time you're eighteen or nineteen, or even later, then I think you're really quite ready for that freedom. I mean it's, well, you make your mistakes, and that's the problem, you know, you make your mistakes, and then your parents help you get out of it, but even if you haven't got that parental support then you can't really complain really, I suppose.

SJ: Do you think any particular groups of students could be more vulnerable than others, perhaps particular disciplines, or maybe foreign students?

Becky: No, I think everybody has got the ability to get up and do it. I mean, I wouldn't say foreign students would be, because I find that most foreign students have a lot of financial backing from their parents anyway. I think also that they're not paying all the normal fees; they're paying like triple what you would normally pay. So usually, they come well-supported financially, and you find that the university finds foreign students jobs most of the time.

SJ: Really? I would have thought they would be harder to find jobs for, especially if there are language difficulties, or if they're not confident with the money.

Becky: I suppose so, but like in my first year, we had two foreign students, and when we were all talking about jobs and who was going to get one where, they had both been guaranteed jobs in the library. They had been promised them on arrival apparently.

SJ: And like you say they generally come well-supported anyway, mmm. And there's nothing else about any particular disciplines or characteristics of certain groups that comes to mind?

Becky: No.

SJ: Out of interest, what subjects do your friends study, the ones that work at ST1's?

Becky: Law and Applied Social Studies, and the other one also does law, just law now I think.

SJ: Right. And have you worked at all while you've been studying?

Becky: Yes, I did last year, but not contract-type work, only as a casual member of staff, probably four or five hours a week.

SJ: So you've never had the problem of juggling work with studies really?

Becky: That's it.

SJ: What about the people around you, that you see who do have to work, how difficult is it for them to juggle everything?

Becky: Well to be quite honest, I don't think an awful lot of people I know do work and study, and I know all the girls in my flat don't work, I can think of only one or two in my ***** club that work, out of forty or fifty girls. I just, I mean obviously there are people who do struggle, but I haven't noticed a great deal of people do work, and of the people I know, the girls from ***** that do work, like those at ST1's and places like that, they only do one or two nights a week at most to be honest.

SJ: So they're not doing that many hours for it to be a problem then?

Becky: No, I think probably some of them work just on a Thursday or Friday night, I don't think it's too many hours, I don't think it's possible to work that many hours, you know, not by the third year. I couldn't work now.

SJ: Not if you can help it, no. And what you're saying then is that of the people you know, not many have to work at all and those that do work don't work many hours, so it's not such a struggle?

Becky: No.

SJ: Have you ever seen any advertising targeted at students, that is, or could be for work in the sex industry at all? You know, like at ST1's or a massage parlour, anything like that?

Becky: No. I think most jobs that come up like that are through the grapevine. I know one of the girls that I know who works there, she started by working behind the bar, and they pay their bar staff well as well, because a lot of people don't like the idea that, well, it's difficult to maintain staff levels because some people are uncomfortable working in that kind of environment. So that was just through the bar job, and the other girl then got the job through her. I think often that's the way, I've never seen anything advertised at all. I think it would be quite difficult to advertise for massage-type places and that, because things like that, well it's quite difficult I should think.

SJ: Yeh, and so if somebody had no problem with doing that kind of work, and decided to do it, would many people know how to go about it anyway?

Becky: Yeh I think so, I think even if they didn't know someone, most people are aware of where the clubs are in town, so I don't think it would be that difficult. For places that do lap-dancing and things like that, and I think they do advertise some jobs in things like the 'Stage' magazine and that, so it's not difficult to find jobs I shouldn't think.

SJ: Ok. What we've talked about so far has mainly been about lap-dancing and things like that, but morally, how do you see the different roles within the sex industry? For example how does lap-dancing compare to prostitution, and how does street prostitution compare to the role of a high-class call girl?

Becky: Yes, there is a difference; I think there's a total difference. I feel that you've got people that I feel that like a lap-dancer, someone that stops there at that point is fine. I think stepping over the mark into prostitution is a total other matter completely, to be quiet honest. There is a definite difference, and I think that's the problem with a lot of people's views about it, I don't think they realise there is a difference, between, well in the sex industry you have different kinds of people, there not all one kind of person. It's like teachers, you have say maths, science and geography, in the sex industry you have lap-dancers, prostitutes and exotic dancers, those that pose nude etc. I mean there's a difference, a total difference.

SJ: A moral difference?

Becky: Yeh, well I don't know about moral, there is just a difference. I wouldn't say one was moral and one was immoral, and I wouldn't condemn one or the other, but I would just say there are differences.

SJ: From your own point of view, are there any circumstances under which you would consider working in the sex industry?

Becky: I don't know. I wouldn't go any further than probably lap-dancing, but I don't think there would ever be any circumstance where I would need to. But if there was, if I needed to, if there was an issue where I had no choice, I think I would, I don't think I'd close my eyes to it.

SJ: No. Right, ok. And how do boyfriends fit into any decision-making about work in the sex industry?

Becky: Well, the people that I know that are involved in things like that are both very independent people. There are two different parts that are completely separated. Like as far as I'm concerned, and as far as they are concerned, it's not an immoral thing to do, I mean, stripping is not an immoral thing to do. So, therefore it shouldn't matter whether you have a boyfriend because you're not doing anything wrong really.

SJ: Do you think prostitution is morally wrong?

Becky: No, but, well it's confusing, I don't think it's immoral, however, it's still not something I would do myself, out of choice. I wouldn't think any less of a prostitute, but I wouldn't do it.

SJ: And if one of the girls you know who work at ST1's said to you tonight, that they'd decided to go out and work as an escort or something, something that was a form of prostitution, how would you feel about that?

Becky: I would be worried for her safety, and for her sexual safety, but I think that it's somebody's life and if they've made that decision, then that's up to them, and it's none of my business. And, if I'm a friend of theirs, then I just accept that. I can have my objections from a safety issues involved there, yeh, but other than that, I wouldn't condemn.

SJ: No. How do you see glamour modelling, topless, page-three and all that - how does that fit in for you in terms of roles within the sex industry? And are you aware of any students doing anything like that?

Becky: No, not that I can think of. But it's just another service really with a sexual motive. I think it's one of the tamer sides of the industry. It's nothing to worry about, but I don't know anyone who's done it.

SJ: It's been suggested to me that the year following graduation is a very vulnerable times, in terms of financial pressures, when you're expected to go out and get a good job and what have you. Do you think that could be true? Is it even harder then?

Becky: I think that would probably be one of the most vulnerable stages to be quite honest, because you can't, well you lose that parental support once you finish university, because they suddenly feel like you should be in control of your own life. But I suppose it depends whether you are fortunate enough to have parents who identify that that is not always true. Yeh, but I reckon that that would be quite a massive thing to be honest, for a lot of people anyway. People expect a lot of you and you expect a lot of yourself too. Probably too much.

SJ: Yes, so that could be quite a vulnerable time too. Have your views about the sex industry changed at any time over the years at all?

Becky: Yeh, I think it changes with maturity to be quite honest, because obviously when you're in your early teens, you think it's something totally, completely disgusting, you know, and lap-dancing, oh my god, how sleazy. But then through time, through age, you realise that it's different, it's not all like that, not nowadays anyway. I mean there are clubs that are sleazy, some are awful, but I think you've also got to realise that it's not just about that. It's just about providing a service, and I think that's why I don't find it immoral, it's simply providing a service, something that society has to cope with. It shouldn't be out on a limb from the rest of society.

SJ: Do you have any opinion of the current laws on prostitution?

Becky: I reckon it should be decriminalised but not legalised. Yes, I've just done an essay on it. I think that should be the prime objective, I mean you can't legalise it because it would just put more restrictions on a prostitute, but to take away the boundaries, it would make it more acceptable to people. You know, I think it's a social problem more than a legal problem. The law shouldn't get too involved.

SJ: If you look at some of the jobs within the sex industry, the money, the hours, the freedom, the demand for young independent girls, it could be described as the ideal job for a student. So why, in your opinion, don't more students take up this kind of work?

Becky: I think it's the stereotyped image, what it is seen to stand for, and a lot of people would be scared that it could lead them into trouble. Like that if you're a lap-dancer you will follow on, not stop there. And in prostitution there's quite a common perception that one thing leads to another. Whether that's true or not is another thing, but it's all about somebody's choice and their independence, and whether they can stand the pressures of it. I think that one thing that has to be taken into account, is that, I find, that people that I know that have done it do get used to that money. They would both find it very difficult to stop now, because they've got used to that money, to getting five or six hundred pounds a week, and then going back down to nothing if they give it up. Or if you get a proper job, and there's no guarantee of that, and just having a degree, the money is still not going to be like that is it? I think that would be fantastic but it's unrealistic. And not for two nights a week. I mean the monetary change would be so hard to cope with, and you wouldn't just be able to give that up.

SJ: So do you think the people that you know will carry on after university?

Becky: Yeh, I think they will certainly carry on until they get themselves a proper job, I think there would be no reason why not to be quite honest, I mean it's just like any other part-time job, you wouldn't give up any job until you had another to go to, another job. It doesn't matter what the job is, yeh, I think they will both carry it on. And even then it's just evenings, so you could carry it on as well as a normal job, I think it is difficult to maintain once you're in a professional job though, so you might stop then. If you're working in a professional job and people knew that you were also working in the sex industry, well I don't think you could do that, professionally.

SJ: No, not in a visible role such as lap-dancing perhaps. It would be difficult. How important do you think someone's family relationships are in determining whether they would be vulnerable to being recruited into the sex industry as a student? How close you are, and that sort of thing?

Becky: I think it's important, but I don't think it's that important. I think that you could associate a weak family background with entrance into the sex industry, because without strong family ties you've got less responsibility. And you've got

less to prove really, you could just go into the sex industry and not have to worry about what your parents would think because you don't have strong ties to them anyway. Also I think that if you're in a modern family, then I think it would be quite acceptable. It depends obviously on what part of the sex industry you're going to, I mean I can't see a Mum or Dad accepting you being a prostitute, but with other things, like lap-dancing are probably ok. And with prostitution, I don't think families matter so much, if you were going to do that it would be just about money, so I don't think they would come into it.

SJ: What else might prevent someone from considering it?

Becky: I think its guts more than anything. I think it's about having the guts to do something that you didn't think you could do. Also, having the guts to go out and get the job. People think you've got to be this perfect sort of person, perfect figure and that, to do lap-dancing and that, the perfect look, but that's one thing that I know isn't true, so I think yeh, its; about having the confidence, and the guts. So, that's a big thing. I mean I don't think I'd have the guts to go and dance on stage like that, and strip off down to nothing; it takes an awful lot of guts to do it. I mean I was talking to my flat mate the other day about it, just joking around, because it's becoming a big thing now, celebrities lap-dancing or pole-dancing and that as a means of exercise. Yeh, and we were both saying how we'd really like to do it, then as the conversation went on we both had to admit that neither of us had the guts to do it anyway. You can't just turn up and have a go, well we couldn't. So although some people might say yeh, I've got no problem with it, that doesn't mean that they would have the guts to get up and do it. Because it's all about looking ok really, carrying it off. You need to be at your best.

SJ: But that's just it, I mean student are in the prime of their life at this age, for most this probably is their best, which is maybe one of the reasons why they are valuable to the sex industry, young, pretty and fit.

Becky: Oh thanks, so it doesn't get any better? No, I know what you mean, a sort of pool of nubile young girls to pick from.

SJ: Yeh, that 's it. Just before we go on to the final vignettes, is there anything else that you think is relevant to the subject that we haven't covered?

Becky: Not that comes to mind, no I think that's about it.

SJ: OK, Thanks for that, well we'll just finish with the final vignettes then and that's it.

Vignette Three

Karen is in her final year at university and is struggling financially. She already works in a pub four nights a week, leaving little time for course work, never mind a social life. She has accumulated a lot of credit card debt and her creditors are closing in on her, threatening action. Karen's father died some years ago, and as

her mother has acted as guarantor for one of her largest debts, Karen is worried that they will soon contact her mother in order to recover it. Her mother is suffering from depression, so Karen is determined to avoid causing her further anxiety.

A local massage parlour is advertising recruitment indicating '*no experience necessary*' and '*fantastic earnings*' just for 'being nice' to their 'discernable clients'. She considers how this would allow her a short-term fix; one or two months should do it Should she:

- a) Talk to her mother about her predicament anyway
- b) Request a year out from her university course.
- c) Take up work in the massage parlour.

Becky: Talk to her mother about it anyway, A.

Vignette Four

Karen decides to go to the massage parlour. Three months later, her debts are now under control, but she continues to work at weekends, as this leaves her weekday evenings free to study. She can also now afford to run a car, allowing her to get home to visit her mother more often.

A friend of hers, Jackie, is about to drop out for financial reasons, only one semester short of graduating. As the university and her family have both been unable to help, she comes to Karen to ask her if she can lend her some money. Should Karen:

- a) Advise Jackie to go home and get a job
- b) Take on more work at the massage parlour in order to lend her friend the money she needs.
- c) Suggest Jackie considers working at the massage parlour herself.

Becky: (Long delay) I don't think she should take on more work, and I wouldn't want to suggest Jackie get a job there, but I'm going to say c, because in this situation its too late to just go home and get a job, and so yeh, she'd have to just work there herself if she couldn't get any other job that paid what she needed.

End of recording

Note 1. ***** Has been used in place of the name of the particular sports club quoted by Becky, in order to protect the identity of other students.

Appendix 5

Research Ethics Form 1:- Project Commencement

Research Ethics Form 2 :- Project Completion