

# 'It's just like going to the supermarket': Men buying sex in East London

Report for Safe Exit

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Miranda Horvath  
Liz Kelly

**cwasu**

CHILD & WOMAN ABUSE STUDIES UNIT

Centre for independent research, evaluation,  
training, consultancy and networking





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There would be no report without the men whose views and experiences form the content.



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## Introduction

*Prostitution is about men's sexuality, not women's. Without men's demand for prostitute women, there would be no such women. (Mansson, 2004:9)*

*Any anti-client enforcement strategy must at least concern itself with the size of the population whose behaviour it seeks to change; social policymakers should perhaps also inform themselves about clients' demographic characteristics such as age, ethnicity, occupation, marital status, reasons for seeking commercial sex and frequency of doing so. (Kinnell, 2006: 212).*

The evidence base of research on prostitution that has emerged over the last two decades (see for example, McKeganey & Barnard, 1997; O'Neill, 2001 and Phoenix, 1999) focuses primarily on women who sell sex, their routes into and experiences of the sex industry. As a consequence, men who pay for sex have been largely invisible in research, discourse and public policy.

This study was commissioned by Safe Exit at Toynbee Hall to explore the decision-making processes of men who pay for sex in the borough of Tower Hamlets and was funded by the Tower Hamlets Partnership. Toynbee Hall produces practical innovative programmes for young people and families, adults, and older people, to meet the needs of local people, improve conditions and enable communities to fulfil their potential. It has established a multi-agency initiative, Safe Exit<sup>1</sup>, aimed at developing in partnership better services for women involved in prostitution and reducing its impact on local communities.

The borough is ranked as one of the most deprived in the country, whilst also containing the Docklands regeneration area that is responsible for creating major employment opportunities in the financial sector. It is also extremely ethnically diverse, with almost half of the population identifying as from black minority ethnic and refugee (BMER) communities.

Tower Hamlets has a well established and visible street soliciting area characterised by drug use and

homelessness (Providence Row and Toynbee Hall, 2003). Research mapping commercial sex across London found off street prostitution in every borough, with Tower Hamlets hosting approximately 18 sites, although none of these were identified as licensed (Dickson, 2004). The borough was noted by the mapping research to be proactive in monitoring commercial sex premises, and working in partnership with CO14 has since established the Safe Exit partnership.

The commissioning of this research is indicative of a commitment within Tower Hamlets to address the issue of prostitution in creative ways that leads to innovative interventions and promising practices. This report addresses the local contexts of commercial sex in the borough as well as patterns of paying for sex that are indicative of wider attitudes and experiences.

### Current Knowledge Base On Sex Buyers

*It is very difficult to identify clients as a distinct group – the behaviour occurs across ages, social classes and ethnic groups, and is increasing. (Ward et al, 2005: 470).*

An emerging body of research on sex buyers has made visible not only the characteristics of the men but also the contexts in which they pay for sex and their motivations.

UK data on men arrested for 'kerb crawling' profiled the average customer as 35 years old, in full time employment with no criminal convictions. Nearly half of the sample were married and owned their own home (Hester & Westmarland, 2004). A review study of 258 men who attended a sexual health clinic in Glasgow and reported paying for sex found the average age of the buyers to be 34.7 years, with 43 per cent in a relationship (Groom & Nandwani 2005). Professionals within the sexual health field have focussed on men who pay for sex as conduits of sexually transmitted infections, but this research has been limited to epidemiological assessments of risk and transmission routes. As all these studies are based on men identified by statutory agencies, it is clear that there is a considerable pool of men

<sup>1</sup> Safe Exit is an original initiative of Toynbee Hall, Providence Row, London Borough of Tower Hamlets and the Metropolitan Police

who pay for sex whose circumstances and decision-making processes are as yet unexplored.

Attempts to gauge the prevalence of buying sex are beset by the difficulties of identifying and contacting men to participate in studies, limited by the stigma and illegality that surrounds prostitution related activities (Chen, 2003 and Soothill & Sanders, 2005). That said, however, there are two large UK probability sample surveys of men aged 16-44 (1990, n = 6000; 2000, n = 4762) which asked about buying sex (Johnson et al, 1994 and Johnson et al, 2001). Whilst the numbers doubled over the ten year period, the actual numbers paying for sex remain a minority. In 2000, one in 29 men admitted buying sex, rising to one in 11 in London where the largest sex markets are concentrated (Ward et al, 2005). In Australia, Rissel et al, (2003) found that one in six men (15.6%) reported paying for sex. No European country comes anywhere close to the 73 per cent of a sample of Thai police officers found in a recent study (Anderson & O'Connell Davidson, 2003).

The increase in reported rates of paying for sex over the last decade has occurred contemporaneously with a re-sexualisation of popular culture (McRobbie, 2006), supporting sexual consumption as a recreational activity (Brewis & Linstead, 2000). The Internet and globalisation have also played their part, providing ease of transport for the purposes of buying sex - referred to as sex tourism but more accurately as prostitution tourism, Farley et al 1998 - and easy access to information about sex markets and pornography closer to home. These factors have not only created more opportunities for buying sex, but also extended the sex industry through lap dancing and pole dancing clubs - now features of most urban spaces - and the mainstreaming of sexualised imagery of women in 'lads mags', advertising and music videos (Kelly, 2005). This normalisation of commercialised sex implicitly supports and promotes paying for sexual services as a legitimate form of leisure and entertainment. The influence of this normalisation is evident in, for example, a 2007 Ofsted report which suggests that the sexually explicit content of magazines such as Nuts and Zoo offer a "very positive source of advice and reassurance for many young people", despite acknowledging that they do this "while at times

reinforcing sexist attitudes" (Ofsted 2007:13/14). The implicit male as norm in this statement is disappointing in the 21st century.

The relationship between the sexualisation of everyday lived experience and the demand for commercial sex is evident in the motivations offered by men who pay for sex. Although multiple and varied (Elliot et al, 2002, Mansson, 2004 and O'Neill, 2001), at the core, they draw on notions of biological imperative and/or the rights of male consumers. These are usually articulated through a male 'sexual drive/need' discourse (Hollway, 1984): more colloquially expressed as a physical 'need' for release/relaxation; and/or that paying means they can choose which woman and what kinds of sex without responsibility. Hilary Kinnell (2006) argues that since sex buyers rarely give the need to be in control as a reason why they pay for sex, this undermines analyses of prostitution as a practice of gender inequality. There are at least three logical flaws in this statement: firstly, 'control' may not have featured in the options offered in survey instruments; secondly the consumerist discourse provides easy legitimisation (Marttila, 2003), and finally underlying foundations for actions are not necessarily openly acknowledged or even explicitly articulated. Clearly if paying for sex is framed by the buyers as "not resorting to commercial sex but as a conscious, consumer choice" (Marttila, 2003:6), then other more complex motivations and contextual factors become increasingly hidden. The gendered nature of the 'prostitution contract' is apparent in the economic power of men to purchase women for the purposes of fulfilling fantasies and desires, and the power over women's bodies, however temporal, that is inherent in the transaction itself (O'Connell Davidson, 1998).

International data on men who pay for sex suggests that they are likely to be using all other aspects of the sex industry such as pornography and lap dancing clubs (Lammi-Taskula, 1999 and Monto & McRee, 2005), and have had higher numbers of sexual partners than other men (Ward et al, 2005). Research with a large US sample (n=1672) concluded that regular sex buyers are less likely to be married, have more sexually liberal attitudes and report greater unhappiness (Monto & McRee, 2005).

The behaviour of men as purchasers has been problematised by research identifying the levels of violence experienced by women who sell sex. One study found that two-thirds of women had been assaulted by clients, but less than a third reported to the police and the highest levels of violence were sustained by women who sell sex on the street (Barnard et al, 2002). Over half (55%, n=130) of women who participated in research in California had been physically assaulted by customers, and 46 per cent of women who disclosed rapes reported that the perpetrator was a customer (Farley et al, 1998). Data from North America, Canada and the UK shows women in prostitution are more likely to be murdered and the perpetrator is most commonly a customer (Brewer et al, 2006 and Kinnell, 2006). Research undertaken in Middlesbrough with men arrested for kerb crawling, (Elliott et al, 2002) revealed that more than three-quarters saw women who sell sex as dirty (89%) and inferior (77%).

It appears then that men who pay for sex are demographically diverse. What commonalities there are centre on attitudes and beliefs, suggesting that the socio-cultural context of masculinity is more significant than sex buyers' personal characteristics and circumstances.

## Policy Context

The contemporary policy context on prostitution is shaped by a historical legacy of focussing on women who sell sex rather than the men who buy. Legislation has framed street prostitution in particular as a public order nuisance created by women's immorality. The 1957 Wolfenden report which led to the Street Offences Act 1959 was based on a belief that women like easy money and that prostitution should be addressed as a social order problem (Self, 2003). More recently, the debate on legal responses to the sex industry has been dominated by the issues of kerb-crawling and trafficking. The weight of the law is therefore directed at distinguishing between innocent victims of exploitation, and the wilful women who choose to sell sex because of the available profit margin. Into

this complex arena has entered a third voice in the last few years – the sex worker discourse – which campaigns for selling sex to be recognised as legitimate work, a job like any other (Kantola & Squires, 2004). Overall, while women have been consistently criminalised, subject to compulsory health checks<sup>2</sup> and regarded as a danger to public health, the behaviour of customers has seldom been the focus of discourse or policy.

Another strand of influence is the evidence that women involved in street prostitution often have histories of multiple disadvantage and instability manifested in problems such as drug use and homelessness (Coy, in press, McKeganey & Barnard, 1997, O'Neill, 2001 and Phoenix, 1999). Recent legislative moves indicate a willingness by the government to engage with the evidence on the social and personal harms of prostitution. The Sexual Offences Act 2003 criminalised overtly exploitative aspects of the commercial sex industry such as buying the sexual services of a child and controlling prostitution for gain. In 2006, the Home Office adopted a 'co-ordinated strategy on prostitution' in response to a public consultation (Home Office, 2006). This document represents a shift in the policy landscape in aiming to disrupt sex markets through tackling demand and providing routes out for women in prostitution. Enforcement measures on street prostitution and kerb crawling are at the core of the strategy, since this context is acknowledged by all parties to be the most dangerous and harmful.

Legislative and policy frameworks shape social attitudes towards women who sell sex. Regulation of the sex industry invites comparative analyses with other European countries that have different approaches, notably Sweden and the Netherlands. In 1998, Sweden introduced legislation that criminalised the purchase of sexual services while decriminalising selling sex and focussing on exiting routes for women (Bindel & Kelly, 2003). While debate continues over the evidential success of the law in reducing the numbers of women in prostitution, the Swedish government is clear that the aim of the law is normative: to change attitudes

<sup>2</sup> Beginning with the Contagious Diseases Acts of the late nineteenth century and continued in all legalised prostitution regimes (Bindel & Kelly, 2003)

over a generation about the acceptability of paying for sex. In the Netherlands, selling sex is a legal profession and highly visible, with Amsterdam a popular destination for all male parties such as stag nights. The liberal laissez-faire position has, however, been under scrutiny in recent years, with local government in Amsterdam re-thinking policy (op cit).

### **Kerb-crawling**

In the UK context, kerb crawling has received attention as a nuisance issue for residential communities. The 1985 Sexual Offences Act criminalised the practice on the grounds of the annoyance caused to local neighbourhoods, with a maximum penalty of a fine. In 2002 it became an arrestable offence, and in 2004 disqualification from driving became part of the penalty options (Westmarland, 2006). Some local authorities have also deployed Anti-Social Behaviour Orders against men who are persistently arrested for kerb crawling (Matthews, 2005).

In the US rehabilitation or educational programmes are being used to address the behaviour of men who solicit women for sex, but there are few examples of these in the UK (Westmarland, 2006). The potential for further development of these programmes is referred to in the government strategy document *Paying the Price* as a successful measure to reduce re-offending and thus the demand for commercial sex (Home Office, 2006). Attendance at the one-day programme is offered as an alternative to prosecution, and the schedule typically includes presentations from women who have sold sex. Critics suggest that it demonises men who buy sex - indeed the focus on kerb crawlers has been said to place women who sell sex under increased pressure to make money with less clients or in a climate of intensive police attention (Campbell & Storr, 2001). The argument that surveillance decreases the time women have to assess 'dodgy punters' is an implicit acknowledgement that a proportion of clients are not just seeking simple sexual release, but have more complex motivations which involve hostility to, and power over, women.



## Methodology

This exploratory study was designed to build on the limited knowledge base on men who pay for sex 'on street', specifically those identified as actual or potential buyers through police kerb crawling operations. If interventions with these men are to be effective, as Kinnell (2006) has noted, we need to know more about who they are, why, how and where they buy and what they get out of it.

In the original methodology, men arrested during two police operations (for 'kerb-crawling' or other offences related to buying sexual services), were to be invited to participate in a short, semi-structured, confidential interview with a researcher whilst at the police station. Previous local operations in Tower Hamlets have run over five-day periods and resulted in between 30 and 40 arrests, giving a potential interviewee 'pool' of 60-80. Whilst the fact of being arrested and held in a police station are not ideal contexts for undertaking social research, it did offer a route to identifying a hard to reach population: men who buy sex on street in the borough of Tower Hamlets.

The first operation took place in the summer of 2006. For three evenings, two researchers and the co-ordinator of Safe Exit were available in the police station to interview men who were arrested. The option was also open for men to self-complete questionnaires, distributed by officers in the custody suite. Contrary to expectation, this operation resulted in very small numbers of men being arrested, none of whom agreed to participate. Procedural changes meant that by the time the second operation took place in February 2007, it was not possible for researchers to be present in the custody suite. The research team therefore trained a Police Community Support Officer, who also spoke Sylheti, to administer the questionnaire at the point where men were being released following arrest and processing. Only 12 men were arrested and of those six agreed to take part. Summary findings from these questionnaires can be found in Appendix 3. As a result of this small sample, alternative methods were devised to obtain meaningful numbers.

Respondents were recruited through placing advertisements in London based newspapers the *Metro*, *Evening Standard*, the *East London Advertiser* and the *Wharf*. The latter two papers were selected for local relevance whilst the *Metro* has both wide availability and readership as a free newspaper. The advertisement read '*Have you paid for sex in East London or the City? Research team would like to talk with you. Confidentiality guaranteed*' and gave a mobile telephone number. The original questionnaire was re-worked to facilitate administration as a telephone interview. In response to the first round of advertisements<sup>3</sup> 105 questionnaires were completed.

The majority (73.3%) of the first 105 respondents reported buying sex solely in off street commercial sex locations. As one aim of the study was to explore the decision making processes of men who buy sex on the street, a second round of adverts were placed. Drawing on the relative success of the previous round, free newspapers were targeted, with an ad placed in the *Metro* and the *London Lite* reading: '*MEN – have you been a customer of street prostitution in London? Research team would like to talk with you. Confidentiality guaranteed*.'

Despite the explicit mention of street prostitution, of the 32 respondents to the second advert three reported only buying on street, 12 said they only bought off street and 16 bought both on and off street (1 respondent did not answer the question). It is maybe that the criminalisation and stigma attached to street prostitution makes men less likely to volunteer to participate in research, or more likely that most prefer off street locations.

Three-quarters of all 137 respondents (n=79) disclosed where they had seen the advertisement. The vast majority (70.9%) were responding to the advertisement in the *Metro*; 13.9% via *Evening Standard*, 8.9% *East London Advertiser*, 3.8% *Hackney Gazette*, 1.3% *London Lite* and 1.3% *Wharf*.

The schedule for the telephone interview was constructed in three sections designed to elicit the highest priority information first. Section one

<sup>3</sup> The advert initially ran once a week for a period of four weeks. Subsequent adverts ran once a week for two week periods.

covered the material circumstances in which the men bought sex: the area they live and work in; area they buy sex; setting in which they buy sex; making contact with women who sell sex. Section two explored: beliefs about, and experiences of, buying sex; which sexual acts they paid for; preferences; motivations and gains; what if anything would deter them; opinions about women who sell sex. The final section gathered basic demographic data such as age, ethnicity, marital/relationship status, sexuality and employment status (See Appendix 1 for the full schedule).

All respondents were asked if the telephone interview could be recorded for transcription purposes. 90 of the 137 interviews were recorded. Of the 47 interviews that were not recorded, some were due to technical difficulties with the recording equipment but the majority were because the respondent refused to allow recording.

## Data Analysis

All quantitative data was entered into SPSS using a coding dictionary developed for this project. This began with a content based coding, and some questions were re-coded for more detailed analysis. In order to ensure the consistency of data entry 10% of the questionnaires (n=14) were selected randomly and two other researchers checked data inputting. No major problems were identified.

All discursive responses were transcribed under a questionnaire number. These were analysed using a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to identify key themes, and coded into emergent patterns. Particular attention was paid to how the respondents construct their accounts of paying for sex. This analysis resulted in the boasting/consuming/confessing constructs illustrated in later sections and all interviewees were subsequently coded along these dimensions.

## Ethics

CWASU abides by the British Sociological Association code of ethics, supplemented by aspects of the World Health Organisation guidelines on research on violence against women. An ethical

question specific to this study was what our responsibility was if any interviewee revealed having used violence towards a woman in prostitution. We developed a protocol for such instances, but did not have to implement it.

## Revealing engagements

For some men, participation was a confessional process, which they appeared to be using for therapeutic or cathartic reasons. Acknowledging either a personal sense of shame and guilt or an awareness of the social stigma attached to buying sex was important for this group. They may have decided to participate in the research in order to 'renegotiate meaning' attached to their experiences of paying for sex (Grenz, 2005: 2111).

*It's been quite beneficial for me to talk to about it, it's given me a chance to reflect on it. (Q105)*

*It's quite good for me to talk to somebody about it, to actually try and put it into perspective, because normally it's a very furtive activity so you don't get to talk about it. (Q136)*

*There's a big element of guilt on me, that's why I thought I would volunteer to call and talk to you. (Q8)*

Some men specifically sought reassurance that their experiences and opinions were 'usual' and 'typical' responses, perhaps in order to re-affirm their 'normality'.

Another group explicitly eroticised the conversation, and in doing so sexualised the female interviewers (see also Chen, 2003 and Grenz, 2005). This ranged from referring to the interviewer as 'love', asking personal questions (such as what we look like, if we were single), to more explicit statements about having 'a big cock', and requesting that we say 'something sexy'. One in ten men answered the question about how they defined their sexuality (intended to elicit information such as heterosexual, bisexual or gay) with responses such as 'very very excessive', 'very erotic', 'excited', 'good in bed' or 'extremely hot'.

Some respondents evidenced a sense of male entitlement through the ease and candour with which they talked about the sexual acts that they

purchased (Grenz, 2005). For example, the questions concerning the decision making processes such as areas that they go to pay for sex, where they find adverts for commercial sex premises, what would deter them (possibly all questions guided at developing intervention or regulatory mechanisms) were ones that these respondents were not interested in. On the one hand, questions regarding what types of sexual acts they pay for, preferences in women, and their motivations, resulted in some offering considerable detail about their thoughts and experiences. In contrast, those who reported shame and guilt were

reluctant to specify or describe the actual acts that they paid for. For a third group, their accounts juxtaposed elements of personal shame and a gendered sense of entitlement, and clearly struggled to reconcile this contradiction.

It was through paying close attention to how men engaged with the research process and questions that some of our concepts and analysis were developed. We paid attention not only to what men said, but how they said it and the responses they sought from us as female interviewers.



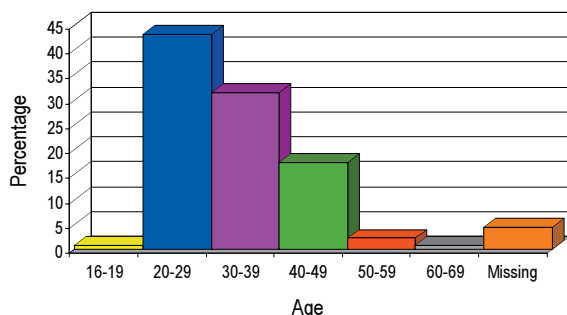


## Paying for sex: Findings

### The Sample

The respondents ranged from 19-64 years, with a mean age of 32 years (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Age of respondents at time of interview**



The majority were aged between 20 and 49 years old, with the largest group aged 20-29 (40%). Whilst this might reflect the readership of the newspapers, it echoes findings from the most recent UK profiles of men who buy sex (Groom & Nandwani, 2005 and Hester & Westmarland, 2004), and suggests that paying for sex is primarily associated with men in their twenties and thirties.

Just over a third reported being in a relationship (35.7%) and a further 16.1% were married. The majority (88.4%) were in paid employment, and over a fifth (22.3%) had children. Interestingly, one in five (19%) did not define themselves as heterosexual, with the alternatives ranging through refusing to answer (6.3%), to bi-sexual (8%) and 'other' (4.5%). This last category included answers such as 'I think I'm gay but I can't accept it', 'Open-minded, I have dabbled with men but don't seek them out' and 'I have fantasies about men but I have never been with a man'.

**Figure 2: Respondents Ethnicity**

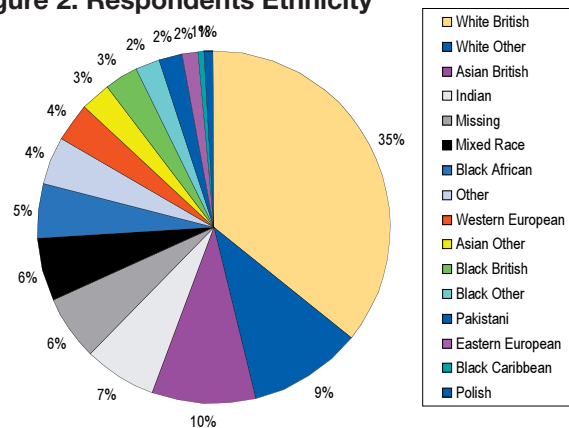


Figure 2 shows the breakdown of the respondents' ethnicity. The sample of respondents differs slightly from the recorded ethnic breakdown of London residents, with figures from the 2001 Census indicating that 71.2 per cent of the population of London are of white backgrounds compared to 59 per cent of our sample.

### Travelling to buy sex

Local connection was not a criterion for inclusion, since we know that men frequently buy sex in areas where they neither live nor work. Research with men arrested for kerb crawling in Middlesbrough revealed that 84 per cent lived outside of the area and travelled in to buy sex (Elliott et al 2002). Similar police data from within Tower Hamlets indicates that 71 per cent of men arrested during kerb crawling operations in 2005 and 61 per cent in 2006 lived outside of the borough.

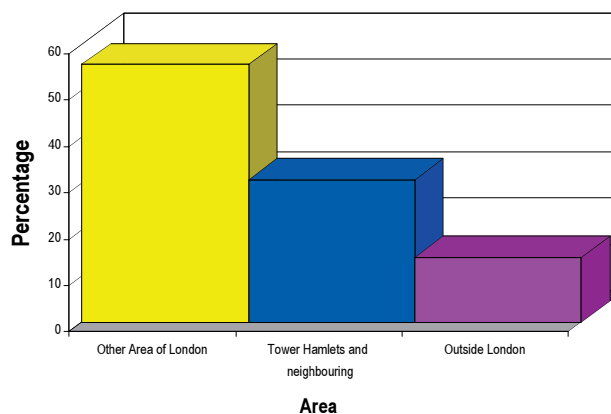
Respondents were asked which London borough they lived and/or worked in. Not all gave specific answers, offering more generic locations such as Central or South, and a proportion lived and/or worked outside London. Coding reflects these variations and Table 1 presents the distribution of the sample in terms of their place of residence. Whilst not the highest category, which is 'outside London', Tower Hamlets is the most commonly mentioned London borough.

**Table 1: Where respondents live**

Borough	N	%
Outside London	19	13.9
East London Tower Hamlets	13	9.5
Newham	11	8
North London Waltham Forest	8	5.8
Hackney	7	5.1
Hammersmith & Fulham	6	4.4
West London	4	2.9
Brent		
Central London		
Croydon		
Harrow		
Lambeth	3	2.2
Redbridge		
South East		
Westminster		
Bromley		
Camden		
Ealing		
Kingston		
Lewisham	2	1.5
Richmond		
Southwark		
Wandsworth		
Barking & Dagenham		
Barnet		
Enfield		
Hounslow		
Kensington & Chelsea	1	0.7
Merton		
South London		
Sutton		
<b>Total</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>100</b>

A second stage of analysis was undertaken, and data recoded into three categories: Tower Hamlets or a neighbouring borough (Newham, Redbridge, Islington, Waltham Forest and Hackney); elsewhere in London; and outside London. Figure 3 shows that just under a third (30.7%) lived in Tower Hamlets or a neighbouring borough.

**Figure 3: Where respondents lived**

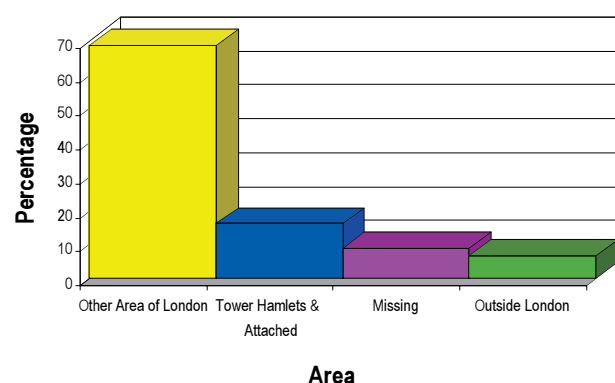


A similar geographical analysis was undertaken for where the sample worked, and Table 2 shows that the largest group reported working in Central London - almost one in five (18.2%). The second stage analysis revealed that less than a quarter work in Tower Hamlets or a neighbouring borough.

**Table 2: Where respondents work**

Borough	N	%
Central	25	18.2
Tower Hamlets	12	8.8
Missing		
Area London	10	7.3
Outside London	9	6.6
East London	8	5.8
Hammersmith & Fulham	6	4.4
Brent		
Ealing		
North London	4	2.9
Waltham Forest		
Camden		
Croydon		
Haringey	3	2.2
Kensington & Chelsea		
South East		
Harrow		
Hounslow		
Lambeth		
Lewisham		
Redbridge	2	1.5
Southwark		
West London		
Westminster		
Barking & Dagenham		
Bexley		
City		
Islington	1	0.7
Richmond		
South London		
<b>Total</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>100</b>

The second stage analysis shown in Figure 4 highlights that less than a quarter work in Tower Hamlets or a neighbouring borough.

**Figure 3: Where respondents worked**


In summary, two fifths of the sample live or work in Tower Hamlets and neighbouring boroughs.

### Buying sex in Tower Hamlets

We investigated paying for sex in Tower Hamlets by asking respondents if they had bought sex in the borough and if they had, which particular areas.

42 respondents had bought sex in Tower Hamlets, and 28 specified more precisely the locations. This data is presented in Table 3, with three areas most often mentioned: Canary Wharf; Bethnal Green; Liverpool Street. A wide range of other areas featured less often.

**Table 3: Areas of Tower Hamlets**

Area	N
Canary Wharf	6
Bethnal Green	5
Brick Lane	4
Liverpool Street	4
Commercial Street	
Mile End	2
Bow	
Aldgate	
Gants Hill	
Commercial Road	
E14	1
Whitechapel	
Isle of Dogs	
Middlesex Street	

\* Multiple response

## Buying in other areas of London

Respondents 106 to 137 were asked if there were particular areas of London they bought sex in (a multiple response answer). Most (28 of 32) identified particular areas and these are detailed in Table 4 below.<sup>4</sup>

Table 4 illustrates the inflated numbers for areas known for visible sex industries such as Soho and Kings Cross. The demand/supply equation is complex, with the latter clearly attracting the former. Neither side of the equation can be tackled in isolation, as availability of women affects sex buyers' decision-making processes.

**Table 4: Areas of London**

Area	N
Soho	6
Kings Cross	5
West London	
City	3
Brick Lane	
Ealing	2
North London	
Baker Street	
Camden Town	
Egham	
Earl Court	
Greenford	
Greenwich	
Hackney	
Hampstead	
Harrow	
Hounslow	
Islington	
Kensington & Chelsea	
Liverpool Street	
Marble Arch	
Oxford Street	
Piccadilly	1
Plumstead Park	
Queens Way	
South East	
South London	
Southall	
Southwark	
Stoke Newington	
Tottenham Court Road	
Tower Hamlets	
Victoria	
Wembley	
West End	
White City	

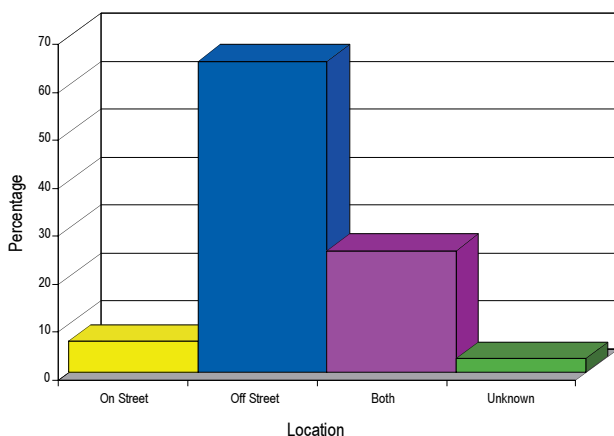
<sup>4</sup> After 105, the advert was changed to explicitly mention street prostitution and this group were asked about all the areas of London they had bought sex in.

### Settings in which men buy sex

*... you don't feel so seedy doing it [off street] ... the calibre of women are better... the ones on the street are normally just drug addicts. (Q100)*

Figure 5 shows that the overwhelming majority of respondents reported paying for sex in off street premises. This finding is significant, as the commercial sex transaction is different depending on the setting – indoors, the encounter is often constructed as a ‘date’ that can simulate intimacy, whilst also being impersonal. In contrast on street paid sex is ‘business’, occurs as quickly as possible in cars, alleys, whatever the weather, constrained by constant vigilance for the possibility of attack and police surveillance. A very small number of men reported buying sex on the street (6.6%) but four times as many respondents buy sex in both street and off street locations (25.5%). Thus just under a third (32.1%) bought sex on the street.

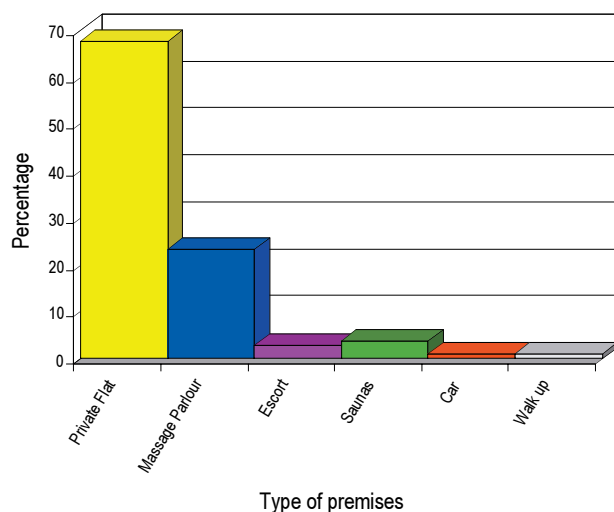
**Figure 5: Where respondents bought sex**



Respondents were also asked in which type of premises they typically bought sex (Figure 6).

Half (n=69) stated that their preferred type of premises was a private flat. These flats would usually fall under the legal definition of brothels, since this is classified as premises from which more than one woman sells sex, even if it is a different woman every day. The frequency of this answer indicates that the unlicensed, clandestine nature of private flats holds an appeal for sex buyers that ‘legitimate’ and/or licensed massage parlours and saunas do not.

**Figure 6: Type of premises visited by respondents**



### Buying sex: decision making processes

In this section we explore the practicalities of paying for sex, how men make contact with women, their frequency of activity and what they pay for.

Table 6 shows the access routes used by men. Respondents were asked to identify a maximum of two most common ways they made contact. Interestingly, local newspapers are by far the most source, which suggests a strong correlation with familiar locales. Advertising features in four of the top five categories, supporting the view that sex markets are created and expanded through such processes.

**Table 6: Contact Routes**

Method of making contact	N*
Ad in local paper	54
Ad in phone boxes	19
Approach on street	14
Ad on the internet	11
Ad in shop windows	8
Taken by friends	7
Walk up	6
No response	4
Word of mouth	

\*Multiple response possible, N does not equal 137

## How often

Frequency of purchase was one area where clear distinctions could be made in the behaviours of sex buyers. International research has presented typologies of first time/occasional/regular customers (Mansson, 2004 and Monto & Mcree, 2005). We coded the responses in more detail in order to illustrate the range of intervals respondents offered (see Table 7).

**Table 7: How often respondents paid for sex**

Frequency	N	%
More than once a week	18	13.1
Once a week	18	13.1
Twice a month	20	14.6
Once a month	23	16.8
Every one to three months	11	8.0
Twice a year	18	13.1
Two/three occasions ever	28	20.4
Refused	1	0.7
Total	137	100

The largest group, constituting a fifth overall (20.4%) had only paid for sex on one/two/three occasions, followed by those who buy sex on a monthly basis (16.8%). Taking 'regular' sex buyers to include all those paying for sex once a month or more, a total of 57 per cent can be classified as regulars. That so many of the sample are committed consumers may indicate that they are comfortable with their behaviour and as such more likely to participate in research.

## What men pay for

*I just go for straight sex usually. Nothing sort of kinky or anything. (Q137)*

Table 8 presents data on what kinds of sex men paid for. That almost three quarters (73%) refer only to vaginal and/or oral sex demonstrates the mundanity of commercial sex. Rather than seeking 'kinky' or 'deviant' sexual services that they find difficult to practise elsewhere, most were paying for conventional heterosexual practices. The specific combinations of acts respondents paid for are detailed in Appendix 2.

**Table 8: The kinds of sex men paid for**

Type of sex	N	%
Vaginal	107	44
Oral	96	39
Anal	17	7
Hand job	15	6
Other	7	3
Missing	3	1
Total	245	100

\*Multiple response possible, N does not equal 137

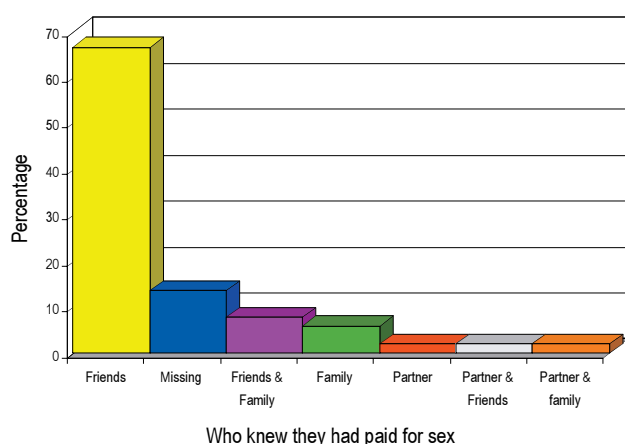
## The wider context of commercial sex

This section explores the broader context of paying for sex, presenting analysis of whether men had told anyone, if they ever felt uneasy and what, if anything might deter them.

### Who knows

Whilst the majority had not told anyone that they had paid for sex, almost two fifths had (39.3%). Figure 7, however, shows that mostly those who knew were friends, and few had told family members or partners. Despite increasing socio-cultural legitimacy and association with celebrity, paying for sex remains a clandestine activity, hidden from all but male peer groups.

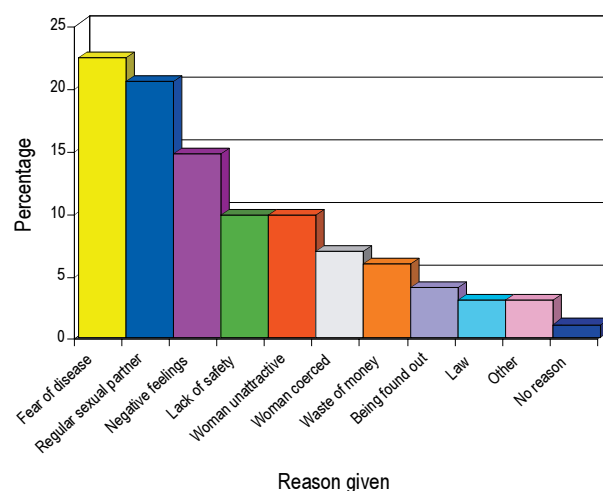
**Figure 7: Who knew the respondents had paid for sex**



### Unease and deterrence

Just over half of the respondents (56.3%) stated that they felt uneasy or nervous when paying for sex. A larger proportion (75%) reported that something might stop them, and these factors are presented in Figure 8. One way of exploring how demand might be decreased was to ask directly about what might ultimately stop men from buying sex.

**Figure 8: What would deter the men from paying for sex**



Some men interpreted the question as what might stop them on a specific occasion ('woman unattractive', 'if woman coerced') whereas others were thinking more generally ('regular sexual partner', 'being found out'). Fear of disease was the most common preventative factor, closely followed by having a regular sexual partner. This clearly connects to powerful constructions of women in prostitution as reservoirs of infection who pose a public health threat not only to men who pay for sex but also the wider community. This belief has been used as a rationale for legal requirements of regular health checks for women selling sex, practices that some of the men strongly supported.

*Women that sell sex, they like having sex with a lot of people, there will be high chance of getting sex diseases. (Q44)*

Only a minority mentioned criminal sanctions, suggesting that current law enforcement measures are not viewed as deterrents. Alternative approaches to tackling the demand for commercial sex in Tower Hamlets should explore the potentials of factors that were more commonly cited, especially the 'negative feelings' and 'waste of money' responses.

### Preferences

The men were asked if they had any specific preferences about the women they paid for with respect to age, ethnicity, body shape, and if they had a 'type' in terms of how they preferred women



to look. Fifteen respondents reported having no preferences.

The most common description of preferred characteristics was a combination of age and appearance, with 46 men (34%) reporting that both of these factors were important to them. Most respondents offered further details about their preferred physical characteristics – 32 (23%) specified that good-looks were essential and five men referred to women being ‘presentable’ or ‘not scruffy’. Preferences for body shape varied - 23 men (17%) reported a liking for ‘curvy’ or ‘large’ women, particularly women with large breasts, and a further 13 men (9%) specified ‘slim’ women.

Ten respondents reported a preference for ‘older’ or more ‘mature’ women and 15 specifically mentioned the word ‘young’. In total 46 men gave preferred age brackets that ranged from 18-45 years, with the most common being women in their twenties.

Preferences for women of a specific racial or ethnic background were described by 39 respondents (28%). These fall into two categories – those men seeking the ‘exotic other’, a common theme in paying for sex (O’Connell Davidson, 1998), and those who preferred women from their own ethnic background.

### Attitudes Towards Women Who Sell Sex

When asked what they thought of women who sell sex, some respondents demonstrated awareness of the contexts underpinning women’s entry into the sex industry such as poverty, coercion, and limited life chances. However this question was interpreted widely, with some offering their opinions on why the sex industry existed and/or the characteristics of the women themselves. A small number of men openly displayed misogyny, suggesting ‘all women are prostitutes’ and that they were just interested in ‘screwing the bird and leaving’.

The core themes that emerged were:

- It’s just a job (n=24)
- Providing a service (n=14)
- Limited options/financial desperation (n=14)
- Just ordinary women (n=10)
- Generally positive opinions (n=10)

- Generally negative opinions (n=10)
- It’s OK if women choose to do it (n=9)
- Don’t think about them (n=6)

One man described changing his perspective towards women who sell sex.

*My opinion’s changed – I stopped doing it [paying for sex] as I started to work for group of girls as a card boy. I made friends with them and saw them as people, I respected them. I didn’t think about them at all when I was paying. (Q11)*

This revealing reflection suggests that work with men on the meanings attached to the sale and purchase of sex – challenging the distancing from emotional connections or human subjectivity – may offer important preventative potential. It requires that we reflect more on what it takes for men to see women selling sex as people i.e. in the same category as them rather than ‘other’.

### Using Pornography

Once the study was underway, the research team added a question about the use of pornography to the telephone interview schedule. A total of 85 men answered this question. Nearly two thirds (62%) reported using pornography and 47 respondents specified frequency of pornography use.

**Table 9: frequency of pornography use**

Description of Pornography Use	N	Percentage
A lot	9	19%
A Little	18	38%
Every day	7	28%
Every week	13	15%
Total		100

The complexity of the links between consumption of sexualised images and a consumerist attitude to paying for sex is illustrated in the range of responses. Some men referred to pornography as boring and contrived compared to paying for sex, or as failing to fulfil their sexual ‘needs’:

*I’m sort of the opinion that it’s not really a looking sport. Pornography doesn’t really do much for me. (Q136)*



*Porn is artificial, the people are not really together, the sounds are not real. (Q117)*

While others saw it on a spectrum with buying sex, even if an inadequate alternative:

*I substitute it for sex as I can't afford to pay for it all the time. (Q92)*

### Buying Sex Overseas: 'Pretty much the same, just cheaper'?

Almost two thirds of respondents (61%) reported buying sex outside of London. Of these, 31% (n=43) had paid for sex overseas. To identify possible links between buying sex domestically and overseas, we asked respondents whether it differed to buying sex in the UK. The countries where they had paid for sex are listed in Table 10.

**Table 10: Other countries where men had paid for sex**

Country	N
Holland	20
Spain	9
Germany	7
Australia	
Czech republic	5
France	
America	4
Thailand	3
Belgium	
Canada	
China	
Denmark	
Egypt	
Gambia	
Hawaii	
Hong Kong	1
Italy	
Portugal	
Scotland	
Senegal	
South Africa	
Switzerland	
Total	72

\*Multiple response possible

The three most popular destinations – the Netherlands, Spain and Germany – are all countries where prostitution is legal. Germany has a legislative and policy framework that regards selling sex as employment and was described as 'a lot more open over there' (Q93). The Netherlands is frequently cited as a model of legalisation and regulation of the sex industry. This has resulted in high visibility of women selling sex in urban spaces, which according to some "makes it possible to see the sex industry as just another social phenomenon" (van Doorninck 2002:193). Some of our respondents concurred with this:

*It almost sort of happens, there was one particularly attractive woman, and she was sitting there with her legs apart in a very available way, smiling at the – you know, and it sort of happens, you just push the door and you find yourself inside there. (Q118)*

Another respondent, who reported paying for sex twice a month, referred to Amsterdam as 'where it started'. (Q70)

The frequency of reports of paying for sex in Spain (n=9) was a surprising finding. However, this may be indicative of the popularity of Spain as a holiday destination for the British.

*Definitely easier [in Barcelona], because they have what are called sex bars, and you go into a bar and sit down and the bar is specifically for, you know, they have ladies in there, you just – you pick a lady you like and you go upstairs with them. (Q73)*

Similar descriptions were evident with respect to Thailand and Australia with legalisation influencing their behaviour and notions of acceptability:

*It's different, I mean they work out of bars there, do you know what I mean? It's not like you go to a flat, do you know what I mean? Cause it's all legal and, you know what I mean, you don't feel so seedy doing it. (Q82)*

*It's not as undercover in Australia, because it's all legal...there are just sort of parlours everyone goes to. (Q137)*

*Australia's different because in most states it's legal ... you can just pick up the phonebook so it's easier. (Q87)*

Respondents were asked if the experience of paying for sex overseas differed from paying for sex in London or the UK. Buying sex overseas was frequently described in positive terms, as 'a better service', 'friendlier', 'girls [are] better quality' and 'cheaper'.

*It's a lot cleaner, the premises are cleaner, they look so they're under some sort of state control, you know, it's like there's always condoms around, the premises are cleaner and the girls look healthier. (Q90)*

For some respondents, though:

*It's the same really anywhere, isn't it. (Q84)*

*Oh no, it's all the same. Yes, it's all the same, it's no big difference at all, it's only the money's different, that's all. (Q56)*

*Exactly the same thing. They lose interest in you ten seconds after they've got your money. (Q67)*

This data supports analysis which suggests the socio-legal context can influence men's attitudes and behaviours. The normalisation of the sex industry and male entitlement to sex have global resonances, but clearly men seek out paid sex where it is easier and most accessible to do so.

## Male Entitlement: Boasting, Consuming and Confessing

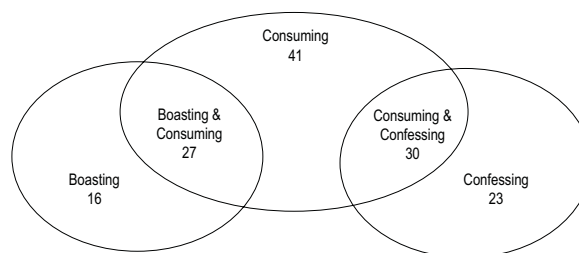
Analysis of the reasons men offered for buying sex reflects an underlying theme of male entitlement. A key element is normalisation, that paying for sex is to be expected and accepted, with frequent justificatory references to history and pre history.

*I think it's just normal, I mean this is probably what's gone on since the beginning of humanity, when women probably tried to deal with men somehow, through the marriages ... So it's just normal really. (Q 34)*

Men's narratives also revealed more complex attitudinal patterns that have been analysed along three dimensions: Boasting, Consuming and Confessing. The distribution of these patterns is shown in Figure 9. The fact that they were not mutually exclusive in men's accounts meant a typology of 'boasters', 'consumers' and 'confessors' would not only have been inaccurate, but missed the overlaps that were apparent for a third of the sample. We analyse this, therefore, as kinds of behaviours rather than kinds of people.

- **Boasting** - A discourse/construction characterised by an equation of masculinity with sexual prowess and women's sexual availability.
- **Consuming** - Paying for sex is framed as a leisure activity that is based on fulfilling a sexual 'need' and/or where women's bodies and sexual services are regarded as commodities that are purchased in a similar fashion to other goods.
- **Confessing** - A discourse/construction characterised by guilt, ambivalence and negative feelings, including for some a recognition of harm and exploitation within the sex industry.

**Figure 9: Distribution of confessing, consuming and boasting**



Clearly consuming is the most common construction, present in part for more than two thirds (n=98).

### Consuming – the central motivation

The key elements of the consuming narrative centre on conceptualizing commercial sex as 'just a job'; a profession and occupation. Within this discourse of consumerism, respondents focused on the quality of service, ease and convenience, locating commercial sex in the market economy. They often invoked a rhetoric of mutual exchange and frequently mentioned the relative cost of buying sex. The themes of 'consumer choice' and 'buying together' are discussed below.

We use the term 'consumerism' here rather than consumption as it refers to a collective attribute of late modern society rather than an individual behaviour (Bauman, 2007). In contemporary social consumerism, human relationships and connections, even desires and wants and needs, are both consumable and disposable. In the commercial sex industry, some of the most intimate levels of human communication have become a normalized form of what Bauman has termed a 'market for consumer goods' (2007: 82).

This is illustrated by accounts based on value for money, that paying for sex is easier and 'more convenient' than going out to meet women. Clichéd cost benefit analysis, comparing commercial sex favourably to dates, was not uncommon.

*There's no questions asked, there's no crap, I could, go out with a girl, take her to a bar, spend a lot of money, but now I could just give her the £40 and you have a half hour with her, and you get*

*anything you want! ... you know, straight in and there's no questions asked and that's basically it... I've taken girls out, and ok, I take her for a meal, that cost me bloody £40... you don't get bugger all after that. (Q13)*

*Ok, you take a woman out or whatever, you're going to pay for it in the long way, you may take a woman out for a meal on a date, it may cost you something like £50, £60 anyway. (Q54)*

These responses raise interesting questions about how men who pay for sex understand relationships and how they conceptualise the commercial sex encounter as another form of normalised leisure activity consumerism. It is unknown whether becoming a regular sex buyer has any impact on men's capacities for relationships.

Some respondents explicitly voiced what Mansson (2004) has referred to as 'shopping for sex', where sex is viewed merely as a product that can be bought and evaluated (evident also on websites such as Punternet).

*We live in a society where we can buy takeaway food for convenience – it's like paying for sex. (Q105)*

*It's just like going to Tescos. (Q116)*

*I just think it's like we live in a consumer society. And I think that's become a bit of a commodity now, really... Just the whole sex thing. Because the internet's there and magazines are there and you've got images all the time. They're like pretty girls and – I mean I'm not intending to be bigheaded but I'm not bad looking, I mean I could get a girl, but meeting that type of girl is not that easy, if you know what I mean. (Q101)*

For these men, the increasing commodification of sex and women provides a context in which not only is commercial sex normalised, but is associated with entitlements: with enough money, you can buy whoever (whatever) you want.

The reinforcement of male entitlement can also be seen in the references some made to the increasing sexualisation of contemporary culture.

*[It's] just a cultural thing, isn't it, where everything is sexualised and certain things are portrayed as normal, and, you know, they're probably not! (Q11)*

The re-sexualisation of culture has been identified as a key component in the demand for commercial sex.

*...[a] culture that indirectly creates a demand for victims by normalizing prostitution. Media depictions of prostitution and other commercial sex acts, such as stripping and lap dancing, that romanticize or glamorize these activities influence public knowledge and opinions about the sex trade. (Hughes, 2004:2/3).*

### **Consumer Choice**

Another key manifestation of the consumerist discourse on the men's accounts is their experience of choice in the transaction. While some men described themselves as 'indifferent' or 'indiscriminate' when choosing women, for others this was an essential element of their consumerist privilege:

*I started going more sort of suburban areas because I felt you got a better services in suburban areas whereas in a big city you don't really get that all the time... a lot of them have websites these days, so you might look in a local paper a lot of them will be advertising their services and then they'll have their website address as well, so you can actually look onto the website, and a lot of them have got pictures of the girls with brief descriptions telling you when they're working, what days.(Q28)*

*I confirm with them the kind of services that they offer, whether they are offering the kind of services that I want. (Q37)*

*It depends on the situation, when I've seen a girl I can decide which one to take. (Q64)*

### **Buying Together**

For some of the respondents, buying sex was associated with the culmination of an evening out with a group of male friends. This has historically been ritualised by outings to strip clubs in corporate events, male only groups such as sports teams, and the popularity of strippers on 'stag nights' (O'Connell Davidson, 1998). The extension of these activities to paying for sex is facilitated by contemporary sexual consumerism with peer cultures and male bonding practices that

collectively support buying sex as a group activity that is embedded in normative constructions of masculinity.

*It was with a couple of friends and we'd been on a night out and we were all a bit horny and we just thought it would be a bit of a laugh really. (Q53)*

*You go out for a few beers with your mates after work and then like, someone'll just mention it, "Let's go get a brass," finish a good night off. (Q84)*

One man talked of choosing not to visit strip clubs, since being unable to have sex with the women in the clubs frustrated him. His account also illustrates the sense of entitlement that many men's consumerist responses contained.

*In Tower Hamlets you've got Metropolis Strip Club, you've got Images Strip Club, you've got five strip clubs all the way along Hackney Road to Shoreditch High Street, that's five within a one-mile radius. Now any red-blooded male goes to these strip clubs, it's waving it in his face, so he's going to leave there and he's going to feel turned on... It's all very well having a gorgeous woman dancing on the stage, but that man in the back of his mind is thinking he wants to have sex with her but he can't. And he has to put money in the jar or money in her garter or whatever, if that's what goes on, but he's got to look but he cannot touch. And that is a frustration. That's why I've never been to one and I'll never ever go to one. If I go to a brothel or a massage parlour and I see a gorgeous woman, I can have her for twenty minutes or thirty minutes, and that's it, and I've got personal satisfaction there. (Q76)*

Clearly for some men strip and lap-dancing clubs are considered preludes to paying for sex. Where there are clubs in which women perform sexualised dance in order to titillate men, nearby premises offering sexual services will benefit. Additionally, for this respondent, the sense of entitlement to sexual access means that being able to look but not touch is of no interest to him; purchasing sexual acts gives him the chance not only to admire women but also to 'have' them.

## Boasting

The key elements of the accounts of boasting are: using explicit sexual detail; a professed love of sex; focus on own sexual prowess and the size of their penis; a belief that all women want sex and gain pleasure from selling sex. All of the men who were categorised as boasting also reported that nothing made them nervous about buying sex. The themes of excitement, having no partner and sex as 'no hassle' are discussed in this section.

### **Excitement, Adventure and Variety**

Five respondents cited excitement as the main reason that they paid for sex, with another eight citing excitement as 'what they got out' of the encounter.

*It's not just the sexual thing, it's more the excitement of going in, of maybe walking up to a door and knowing that five minutes later you might be having sex with somebody that you've never met before, never had any connection with, I quite like the excitement of that. Obviously the sexual part is – is certainly an aspect but there's other reasons as well, the excitement and the adrenalin. (Q28)*

The desire for sexual variety was offered by 11 men as a motivating factor and for an additional two, as the ultimate outcome.

*Sexually I like a lot of variety, and I've got quite a high sex drive anyway, but my drive's only high with a lot of variation, I mean even if I went to a place that was really nice and the girl was really nice, I'd never go back to see the same girl, I'd always try something – something different. (Q28)*

*I want variety, I can't have sex with my wife every day, you know. And she doesn't give me good company. (Q36)*

The notion of biological imperative surrounding male sexuality has been linked by many to multiple sexual partners. The frequency with which men mention variety suggests that they view it as something they are entitled to – paying for sex enables them to exercise this prerogative.



### **No partner, but need sex**

The entitlement to sex was nowhere more obvious than for the sixty-seven respondents (48%) who reported that they were currently single or not in a relationship. Less than half of this group referred to their singlehood as a motivation for paying for sex, but for the majority a strong biological need argument was evident that has been termed the 'male sex drive discourse' (Hollway 1984). The 'need' for sex was presented as taken for granted reality, illustrated by the recurrent use of the words 'need' and 'urge'.

*I'm a single person, I have no partner. I'm not getting it elsewhere so I need to pay for it. (Q70)*

Whilst some acknowledged that masturbation offered a way to ease frustration, the availability of commercial sex made this a less attractive option.

*When I get the urge, I want to relieve the tension... Instead of masturbating myself I get relieved. (Q6)*

This suggests, as Chen (2003: 5) has noted about male sex buyers in Taiwan, that "physical sexual needs are not the first concern; instead it is how to have sex in masculine ways that makes seeking prostitutes desirable".

The long hours culture provided further legitimisation:

*It's not complicated – it's less of a headache, less arrangements. I work long hours and I'm single. (Q5)*

*It's more convenient really....well firstly with the kind of hours I work, trying to be in a relationship is quite hard. (Q 43)*

The 'ease and convenience' of paying for sex to meet their unquestioned needs enabled some men to argue that this entitled them to a prompt sexual transaction which required little other than cash on their part (Mansson, 2004):

*Sometimes I'm busy and just want to go in quick. (Q99)*

### **No hassle**

A theme found in previous research on sex buyers is the desire for sex without any emotional

connections (Chen, 2003 and Kinnell, 2006). This 'no strings' or 'no hassle' story was also evident for the respondents in this study:

*There's no ties, really, you know what I mean, it's just like – it's more or less a business, I mean we pay for it and we get what we want, and at the end of the day there's no strings attached. (Q29)*

*I don't have to ask or think "No, is that too dirty for her?" or – like I don't really have to be as respectful as if it was my girlfriend or my wife or partner. (Q48)*

The absence of negotiation, emotional responsibility and even respect are strong attractions for some men, suggesting that a double standard – the 21st century re-working of the virgin/whore dualism – persists in men's views of women who do and do not sell sex.

A small minority had developed emotional relationships with women they paid for sex. For this group, the emotional element was as important as the sexual encounter. They, however, like their more detached counterparts choose to ignore that women were paid to act in this way. In a similar way boasting that emphasises women's sexual pleasure operates by forgetting that they paid women to simulate sexual enjoyment. Men enjoyed being able to treat women in the commercial sex encounter in ways that they would not or were not able to treat women with whom they had ongoing relationships, and in this process constructed women who sell sex as 'other' (O'Connell Davidson, 1998). This othering may in turn provide the foundation for the all too frequent violent behaviour meted out to women in the sex industry (Monto & Hotaling 2001).

### **Confessing**

We define as confessing those accounts that contained descriptions of guilt and shame and where men explored negative feelings as a consequence. Some drew on notions that commercial sex was wrong and demonstrated awareness of coercion and trafficking. Almost half of those classified as confessing (22 of 53) had only paid for sex on one/two/three occasions and stated that they were unlikely to buy sex again. All reported feeling nervous when paying for sex.

An unexpected finding was the frequency of narratives of guilt and shame. Feelings here ranged through disappointment to self-hatred.

*[I didn't get] as much as I thought. No comfort, so not the best experience. It made me realise I need the comfort you get from a girlfriend. (Q23)*

*At the time I get temporary relief from negative feelings, but actually it fed the negative feelings so it's not productive. (Q11)*

*It doesn't make me feel good, having sex and having paid for it, it seems like you are a pimp. (Q44)*

There are few places where men are able or encouraged to express this level of ambivalence. Monitoring of websites such as Punternet suggests that men who express uncertainty are censored and discouraged from becoming regular posters (Earle & Sharpe, 2007). There is, therefore, considerable scope to engage with men about the gap between their expectations and the reality and outcomes of paying for sex. Exploring men's own uncertainties may be a deeper and stronger way for alternative ways of thinking to take root. It offers the potential for change to emerge in the intersection between cultures of masculinity and men's conflicting personal experiences.

### Overlaps: the market is all

Where the overlap was boasting and consuming, accounts were characterised by a form of hedonistic excitement where the subjectivity of the women is absent. 'I never think about them' was a common response here. For these men, paying for sex is pleasurable, the women gain pleasure and for some men, the thought and the process of finding women and the negotiation are part of the pleasure.

Some described paying for sex as a mutually beneficial exchange between buyer and seller. This was framed primarily as an economic transaction where men paid to satisfy their sexual needs and met women's financial needs. For some, however, the notion of a mutual exchange rested on the sexual enjoyment that they presumed they were giving women. Julia O'Connell Davidson (1998) suggests that this 'fiction of mutuality' is a way in

which men justify buying sex: if women are enjoying paid sex and apparently benefiting then there can be nothing wrong with the idea or the practice.

*I've got a need and they've got a need, so we're both taking care of each other's needs. (Q29)*

Where confessing and consuming overlapped tensions were evident between the perceived social normalisation of commercial sex and their emotional experience of buying sex. Some men also reported conflict with their religious or moral framework. Consumerist normalisations offered them a way to justify or explain their behaviour in terms that minimised moral censure.

*I think it's wrong, in a way, but I suppose it's just life really, innit? It's just the way it is. I do think it's wrong. (Q80)*

### Awareness of trafficking and exploitation

Respondents were asked if the majority of women that they bought sex from were British or non-British. Some answered this with descriptions not just of the women that they individually paid for sex, but with wider observations. Almost half (43.1%, n=59) estimated that the majority of women were not British, almost a third (30.7%) that the women were mainly British and 18.2 per cent thought it was roughly 'half and half' British and non-British. The most common answer when asked to identify where non-British women were from was Eastern Europe. Only six men demonstrated any explicit awareness of trafficking.

*I think most of the womans who are – were sex slaves here in London, they come from the poor family, some poor countries in East Europe....and they need money. I think they have family there in their country, they have to support them. I think that's why they're doing this for money. (Q14)*

*I don't like Eastern European girls. ...they're coerced into it, I'm not happy to think that someone's coerced. I mean I went with one and to be honest I really couldn't go through with it, because I just got the feeling that ..I felt she was sort of being compelled, and when I said "I'm going to go", she was looking quite tearful, so I*

*handed her over the money anyway. I felt concerned there was someone controlling her in the background..... I have noticed a big influx and they are a hell of a lot cheaper, they undercut British girls every time. (Q102)*

One man argued that discussions of trafficking were an inaccurate representation of the sex industry, since they did not match his experiential knowledge.

*I mean a lot of the ones I've met are sort of quite freely doing it. They're not, they don't work for anyone they're all freelances. I think it's all a myth that they're all slaves and things. Certainly the British ones, anyway, I don't know about the foreign ones. (Q67)*

Several men made a distinction between those women who are forced to sell sex and those who are 'doing it out of choice'.

*They [women] come into two categories, those that feel positive about the environment and those who almost feel like victims. (Q133)*

*Provided it's done of their own free will and they're not slaved into the industry, I've had no problem. It's their own decision, their own choice, of their own free will, then I've got no problem with that. (Q22)*

For some men their sense of entitlement was supported by both sexism and consumerism:

*A couple of places I visited, it was Slovenian and Polish girls and I wondered whether they were kind of being forced into it. But I never discussed it with them because I went there just for sex. Although I did wonder whether they were being forced into it. (Q10)*

*I've done it with women, that I know who don't want to do it... in the sense that you can just – I suppose you can just tell... when they come and see you first, you can see like they don't want to – as in like they're not very happy, or they might act a little bit stropy. (Q1)*

This distinction between women who are 'forced' and those who 'choose' to sell sex reflects intellectual and policy debates about prostitution, which have polarised around commercial sex as a form of labour to be afforded employment rights, and concerns about the exploitative foundation of the commercial sex industry and the commodification of women's bodies. These debates around choice and agency are almost always focussed on women who sell rather than the men who buy. Men's capacity to choose and act has rarely been the subject of critical scrutiny. Responses of men in this sample showed that a minority had value positions whereby they took time to notice if women were 'free' to choose. Others simply presumed that so long as there was no incontrovertible, visible evidence of force, women were on an equal footing with them.



## Conclusion

The data from this project demonstrates that men who pay for sex are diverse in terms of their demographics, circumstances and attitudes - neither socio-culturally deviant nor 'everyman'; their decision-making processes are located within dominant discourses of gendered sexual mores and local availability of women who sell sex. Strategies aimed at addressing demand for commercial sex in Tower Hamlets will therefore need to be multi-layered, attuned to the variations in men's behaviour, understandings and vocabularies of motive and entitlement. As two thirds (65%) are only buying sex in off street locations, strategies and law enforcement measures that focus on kerb crawling will have limited purchase on demand if not accompanied by other interventions. Whilst based on current legal contexts, they also run the danger of communicating messages that are confusing: for example that it is the location, rather than the practice, of paying for sex that constitutes the problem.

Research is increasingly demonstrating that the socio-cultural context influences demand for paid sex, and this study adds to that body of work. For example, the accounts of men who had paid for sex overseas confirm that legality contributes to normalisation, which in turn increases the likelihood of paying for sex. Travelling to pay for sex and cultures of tolerance are local as well as transnational journeys. We know that reputations for a strong and visible sex market can affect flows of supply and demand, so the strategic forum on prostitution within Tower Hamlets needs to seriously assess the opportunities open to it in minimising normalisation and discouraging 'short distance prostitution tourism' into the borough.

Clearly current law enforcement measures are ineffective in tackling the enduring sense of entitlement that some men have with respect to sexual access to women, but we also explore whether they are appropriate to other groups, specifically those whose responses include ambivalence, guilt and shame. A foundation of kerb crawler interventions, especially those based on US models that include making public names and/or number plates of those convicted, is to generate

shame as a deterrent. Our data, however, suggests shaming may not deter. Whilst a significant proportion of the sample reported feeling shame and guilt in the aftermath of paying for sex, for only a few did this sense of shame convert into changing behaviour. We, therefore, need to better understand these trajectories and their implications for policy and practice. For the growing category of men who view buying sex as a form of mainstream consumerism, as leisure/ entertainment, there is no shame, so attempting to generate it will have little if any impact.

Interventions with sex buyers need to be more subtle, rooted in what might transform diverse attitudes towards commercial sex. Occasional/first time sex buyers are likely to be more sensitive to awareness raising (Mansson 2004). Targeted policy to address this group of men should consider some of the issues that they describe as deterrents. Some referred to their actions as an addiction or compulsion. Addressing this group needs to factor in the ways they frame their behaviour as compulsive, inescapable and/or an entitlement. Respondents who framed buying sex as an addiction and compulsion were not entirely comfortable either, but lacked impetus to change their behaviour, so here enhancing motivation to change is the challenge. A number were explicit that they thought what was on offer were illusions. The way that some men referred to pornography and strip clubs as frustrating their entitlement to 'have' women suggests the need for more research documenting the links between consumption of sexualised images and sexual services.

We have already indicated potential routes for engagements, beginning with contrasting the normalisation message. The guilt, shame and ambivalence some men report are also worth paying attention to, particularly providing messages and resources that encourage a resistance to normalisation. The lack of respect paid to women who sell sex was evident in the negative and derogatory attitude of some of the buyers. Perhaps most interesting was the suggestion in one interview that viewing women as people was itself a deterrent. This illustrates conclusively that men can and do change their attitudes towards buying sex and a key avenue to achieve this is through

recognition of women's subjectivity and the contributions men (even as individuals) can make to reducing gender inequality.

*The more I go, the more the industry is going to be growing, isn't it? If I can stay away, then probably it will make it better. (Q8)*

## Recommendations

We are conscious of the tendency to make large numbers of recommendations that are aspirational rather than realistic, especially in an arena where resources are limited. We are also conscious of how limited our knowledge base remains in this field. As a consequence we make only four broad recommendations directed at reducing demand, organised around primary, secondary and tertiary prevention, or put another way how we encourage different groups of men to never buy sex, to buy less sex and to stop buying sex.

### Primary prevention: work in schools

The findings from this study could usefully build on the local exhibition 'Prostitution: What's going on?', based in the Women's Library from 21 September 2006 - 28 April 2007. Resources developed for the schools programme could be adapted to build a long-term strategy to reduce local demand for paid sex, increasing the group who choose not to do this. Key themes here could highlight that many sex buyers are ambivalent, in order to counterbalance normalisation messages especially in popular culture. Exploring the ways in which paying for sex might limit opportunities for relationships is also important.

### Secondary prevention: awareness raising and access

The themes in the men's accounts such as thrill/excitement and male bonding suggest that the meanings attached to buying sex are important. Awareness raising campaigns should aim to reframe these meanings, drawing attention not only to ambivalence but also the preference expressed by

many men for a regular sexual partner. That the majority of respondents confided only in male friends and peers suggests that the influence of a public education campaign could stretch beyond the buyers themselves to include their implicit and explicit supporters. Tapping into men's own unease offers more potential in our view than making claims about the likelihood of conviction which are not taken seriously when the chances of being caught and convicted are so small.

The high number of respondents who accessed commercial sex premises through advertisements (n=84), especially in local papers, suggests action could be considered here. It has been argued that the policy in Southwark to not accept advertising for sexual services contributed to a low figure of identified commercial sex premises in the borough (Dickson, 2004). Regulation of the marketing of sexual services has potential to limit, and possibly even shrink, local sex markets.

### Tertiary prevention: kerb crawler interventions

What men have revealed about where, when and why they pay for sex suggests that kerb crawler programmes will be of limited value in addressing the demand for commercial sex, since men increasingly use the off street sector. That said, however, work with men who become the subject of criminal justice intervention has potential. Our suggestion is that such programmes be based not on shaming, but rather on exploring the spectrum of men's uncertainties and motivations.

## Final Thoughts

We are aware that secondary and tertiary prevention with respect to demand has implications for women who sell sex. It is imperative, therefore, that work on sex buyers is never funded from monies that would otherwise offer support and routes out for those who sell sex. Indeed continued investment in services for women who sell sex should be at the core of any local strategy to address demand.

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## Appendix 1 – the Telephone Interview Schedule

### Interview Guide

#### Men who pay for sex in Tower Hamlets

Hello, thank you for phoning.

We are researchers working on behalf of a multi-agency partnership looking at the sex industry in Tower Hamlets.

If they want more information refer them to Ian McGimpsey, Head of Adult Advice and Education, Toynbee Hall Tel:02072476943?

Are you happy to answer some questions about paying for sex in Tower Hamlets?

Are you happy for us to record the conversation?

Priority questions

What borough do you live in?

--

What borough do you work in?

--

How often do you buy sex?

1	More than once a week	
2	Once a week	
3	Twice a month	
4	Once a month	
5	Every one to three months	
6	Twice a year	
7	One/Two/three occasions ever	
8	Missing	
9	Refused	

Do you normally buy on street/off street or both?

Street	
Off Street	
Both	

Which areas of London do you normally buy sex in?  
(Please tells us all the areas)

--

Why do you go to those areas of London? (please tell us all the reasons)

--

If you buy off street is there a particular type of premises you usually go to?

Yes	
No	

If yes what? (please rank in the order they say)

1	Private flat	
2	Massage parlour	
3	Escort	
4	Saunas	
5	Missing	
6	Refused	
7	Car	



How do you make contact? (Please tell us all the ways, please rank in the order they say)

1	Ad in Phoneboxes	
2	Ad in shop windows	
3	Ad in local paper/magazines	
4	Word of mouth	
5	Approach on street	
6	Taken by friends	
7	Missing	
8	Refused	
9	Internet ads	
10	Walk past, saw sign, went in	

Have you ever paid for sex outside London? (Overseas?)

Yes	
No	

If yes where?

If have bought it overseas was it different to buying at home? How?

### Extra Information

Do you have any preferences about the women you buy sex from? Specifically Age and Ethnicity

What 'type' of woman would you prefer to buy sex from? e.g. age, looks, ethnicity, cost, sexual practice

What proportion of the women you have bought sex from were British/non-British?

We have some more questions if you have time? What are the kinds of sex you pay for most often?

What do you think about women who sell sex?

Does your partner/family know you pay for sex?

--

What are your motivations for paying for sex?

--

What do you get out of paying for sex?

--

Do you ever feel uneasy or anxious paying for sex?

--

What, if anything, would deter you from paying for sex?

--

Do you use pornography?

Yes	
No	

How much/often do you use pornography?

A lot	
A little	
Everyday	
Every week	

Do you use the internet to look at pornography?

--

Ending the Phone Call

Thank you very much for taking the time to contact us, the information you've provided is very useful.

Would you mind providing us with some basic information? It cannot be used to identify you, just to get a sense of our sample

If yes:

How old are you?

--

Are you in paid employment?

Yes	
No	

How would you describe your ethnicity?

Arabic	Asian British	
Asian Other	Bangladeshi	
Black African	Black British	
Black Caribbean	Black other	
Chinese	Eastern European	
Indian	Mixed race	
Pakistani	Polish	
Western European	White British	
White other	Other (specify)	
Refused		

Are you in a relationship?

Yes	
No	

If yes, are you married?

Yes	
No	

Do you have children?

Yes	
No	

How would you describe your sexuality?

--

Thank you very much for your time



## Appendix 2 – The specific combinations of sex acts men paid for

Type of sex	N	%
Oral & Vaginal	64	46.7
Vaginal	25	18.2
Oral	11	8.0
Other	7	5.1
Oral & Vaginal & Anal & Hand Job	5	3.6
Oral & Vaginal & Anal		
Oral & Anal	4	2.9
Oral, Vaginal & Hand Job		
Oral & Hand job		
Vaginal & Anal	3	2.2
Missing		
Hand job	2	1.5
Vaginal & hand job	1	0.7
Total	137	100

### Appendix 3 - The Kerb Crawler Questionnaires

The questionnaires completed by six of the 12 men arrested for kerb crawling in February 2007 were analysed separately, as some of the questions were constructed differently to enable them to be administered within the police station. Comparative analysis is not meaningful for this reason and because there was a large amount of missing data. Demographically, however, the men were very similar to the full sample of 137 telephone respondents:

- 4 out of 6 were in employment
- 4 described their ethnic background as Bangladeshi
- 1 Eastern European
- 1 Asian British
- 4 were in relationships and 3 of these were married
- 3 lived in Tower Hamlets

The question 'Would any of the following stop you from paying for sex' offered the respondents 11 tick box options: arrest; a big fine; named in local paper; an Acceptable Behaviour Contract; attendance at a kerb crawler rehabilitation programme; robbery; losing driving licence; an Anti Social Behavior Order; family finding out; fears about health; knowing a woman was forced. The respondents' answers were multiple and ranged from

- 'I don't think it's right' (1 man)
- Robbery (1 man)
- A big fine (3 men)
- An Acceptable Behaviour Contract (3 men)
- Losing driving licence (3 men)
- An Anti Social Behavior Order (3 men)
- Fears about health (3 men)
- Arrest (4 men)
- Named in local paper (4 men)
- Family finding out (4 men)

Revealingly, none of the men arrested for kerb crawling reported that they would stop paying for sex if they knew a woman was forced into selling sex.





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