

A different kind of risky business: Men who manage men in the sex industry

Sexualities

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journals.sagepub.com/home/sex**Tuulia Law** 

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Abstract

Drawing from qualitative interview data, this article examines men who manage men in the sex industry. A gendered lens reveals that male sex work management engages with sexual and gender scripts in ways that are quite distinct from female sex work. These third parties assume that male sex workers can defend their own security but notably also worry about male workers victimizing them, even as they opportunistically deploy hegemonic masculinity in their business and security practices. The article highlights and reflects on how these framings shape managerial strategies, perceptions of risk and the law, and experiences of stigma.

Keywords

Male sex work, third parties, masculinity, sexual scripts, stigma

Introduction

Endeavoring to dispel dominant myths about the sex industry as exclusively exploitative, a proliferation of critical studies has recognized women in sex work as agentic, and their customers and managers as ordinary (e.g., [Bruckert and Law, 2013](#); [Benoit et al., 2020](#); [Casey et al., 2017](#); [Egan, 2006](#)). Such studies have also highlighted how (hetero)normative gender scripts intersect with racialization and class and are resisted and reproduced in service and workplace interactions and managerial practices (e.g., [Bouclin, 2006](#);

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Brooks, 2010; Bruckert and Parent, 2018; DeMichele and Tewksbury, 2004; Raguparan, 2017). As with those framing prostitution as violence (e.g., Barry, 1995; Farley, 2004), however, most of these studies focus on female sex work. Absent from both perspectives, then, is the relationship between male sex workers and the people who manage them—an absence reflecting assumptions that male sex workers are a negligible or nonexistent population not at risk of violence. Drawing from a larger interview-based study on third parties—individuals who organize, supervise, manage, or coordinate the labor of sex workers—this study endeavors to address this gap by examining the perceptions and practices of men who manage men in the sex industry.

Attending to the mobilization of gender scripts, stereotypes and hegemonic masculinity reveals that male sex work management reproduces and resists gender norms in ways that are quite distinct from female sex work. Notably third parties assume not only that male sex workers can take care of their own security but also that they may initiate violence. After elaborating on how these framings shape how men who manage men organize their business and understand and mitigate risks, laws, and stigma, the study concludes by reflecting on the implications of the profound intermeshing of masculinity, desirability, and aggression.

Literature review

Although a handful of studies focus on agencies (see Salamon, 1989; Smith et al., 2008; 2015; Smith and Seal, 2008; Morrison and Whitehead, 2007) and strip clubs (see DeMarco, 2007; Dressel and Peterson, 1982a, 1982b; Kaufman, 2009; Montemurro, 2001; Scull, 2013; Tewksbury, 1994) featuring male service providers, the male sex work literature frequently emphasizes the rarity of men working for third parties. Two recent Canadian studies are illustrative: among Dawthorne's (2018) 43 male participants, seven worked in managed establishments (strip clubs and erotic massage parlors), and only two had worked with agents; and in another project aiming explicitly to capture a gender and racially diverse sample, all 33 male participants worked independently (Jiao and Bungay, 2019). Indeed scholars often describe male sex workers as "independent owner-operators" (Logan, 2017: 5) who have "greater control over their working conditions," work more sporadically, and face less managerial exploitation as compared to women (Ellison and Weitzer, 2017: 182). Highlighting the impact of dominant gendered framings even on researchers, Logan (2017: 5) draws a "stark contrast to female sex work, where fees for services are usually set by and shared with pimps or madams," without citing any references, suggesting a normative assumption rather than an empirically based comparison; Wilcox and Christmann (2008) similarly assert that male sex workers have more free choice and face less risk than their female counterparts.

Gender nevertheless informs discussions of risk in the male sex work literature. Scholars have highlighted how homophobia and stigma engender sexual and physical violence by clients (Dorais and Feldstein, 2005; Jamel, 2011; Scott et al., 2005) and police officers (Redwood, 2013). However, Ellison and Weitzer (2017: 195) argue the risk of client violence "is mitigated to some extent by the youth and physical strength of many" male sex workers; Smith et al. similarly suggest male sex workers are not fearful and feel

“confident in being able to handle inappropriate clients” (2015: 1053; see also Wilcox and Christmann, 2008). Other scholars note that male sex workers are perceived as and/or pose risks to clients, including of blackmail, robbery, retaliatory violence, and murder (Logan, 2017; Scott et al., 2005; Sterry, 2002), and for women, of sexual assault (Scull, 2013). As Dennis (2008) argues, such characterizations do not allow for male sex workers to be seen as victims. In turn, men are often blamed (Redwood, 2013), are not believed, blame themselves for (West and De Villiers, 1992), or rationalize client violence (Ellison and Weitzer, 2017) via the gendered expectation that, endowed with physical strength and aggression, they could and should have stopped it. They (and academics) also minimize inappropriate behavior by female clients (Montemurro, 2001; Scull, 2013).

Nonetheless, as with female sex workers (Casey et al., 2017), researchers insist male sex workers feel and are safer working in indoor managed spaces than independently on the street (Bar-Johnson and Weiss, 2015; Luckenbill, 1986; Smith et al., 2015). They note agency third parties supply screening and/or drivers, blacklist or berate hostile clients, and help male sex workers manage stigma and shame (Dorais and Feldstein, 2005; Perkins and Bennett, 1985; Scott et al., 2005; Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2008, 2015). However, these supports can be undermined by the above-noted perception of men as invulnerable (West and De Villiers, 1992). Stereotypical masculinity also informs, but does not exhaust, the qualities sought by third parties: conventional attractiveness including a preference for whiteness, reliability, style, and social and sexual proficiency (Luckenbill, 1986; Salamon, 1989; Smith et al., 2008, 2015; West and De Villiers, 1992). Other third-party practices, such as only hiring men over 18 years of age (Luckenbill, 1986) and forbidding (encouraging workers to hide) condoms at massage parlors (Wong, 1995; qtd. in Allman and Myers, 1999), aim to mitigate the risks of criminalization, while discretion minimizes legal risks as well as stigma (Salamon, 1989).

Theoretical framework

Given the importance of gender in the literature and the focus of this article on men, the present analysis is informed by scripting theory and hegemonic masculinity. Longmore describes scripts as “normative clusters that specify the parameters for lines of action in given social contexts” (1998: 51). Scripts inform expectations and decisions about how a social interaction should unfold, as visible in normative conceptions of who should be the active or passive party during sex, applied to oneself (self-conception and behavior), and one’s partner (desire and expectations) (Simon and Gagnon, 1986); scripts are also applied in situated occupational roles by their performers and inform the interpretation of the role by their audience (cf. Goffman, 1959). Sex work is thus informed by sexual and gender scripts in various ways.

Workers in many occupations are expected to perform a particular iteration or cluster of gender, sexuality, class, and race (Kaufman, 2009; Scull, 2013). For example, masculinity is eminently visible in the role of the nightclub (or strip club) bouncer, who is expected to have a muscular physique, an intimidating presence, and exert physical violence (DeMichele and Tewksbury, 2004; Hobbs et al., 2005; Rigakos, 2008). Analogously, gay pornography is replete with “idealized, generic, muscular, male performer[s]” (Mercer,

2003: 280). Such iterations conform to Carrigan, Connell, and Lee's conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity, the most "culturally exalted form of masculinity" that not only sustains the "institutionalization of men's dominance over women" (1985: 592) but also "require[s] all other men to position themselves in relation to it" (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005: 832), thereby reinforcing unequal power relations between social groups. The normative ideals comprising hegemonic masculinity are communicated through exemplars—such as professional football players who exhibit physical strength, power, and aggression—that inform how men enact masculinity in everyday life and the expectations to which they are held (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). That such conventional characteristics are exalted even in gay communities—for example, by excluding and normalizing lower rates for effeminate men and "bottoms" in commercial sex contexts—speaks to the broad influence of hegemonic masculinity and its devaluation of femininity (Burke, 2016a, 2016b). At the same time, Mercer argues that hegemonic masculinity is adapted and at least partially subverted in fetishized "homoerotic prototypes" (2003: 287)—"soldiers, sailors, construction workers, and body builders" (ibid)—popular in gay pornography (see also Kaufman, 2009).

Illustrating the implications of gender's intersection with other identity categories (Crenshaw, 1989), masculine characteristics such as sexual prowess, aggression, and wealth must be accompanied by other normative attributes to form a masculine exemplar. This is evinced in the class and racial distinction between the besuited, conservative (and heterosexual) corporate leader—the "old boy" archetype that continues to inform the disproportionate share of white men in such positions (Block and Galabuzi, 2011; Whitehead, 2002)—and the pimp, a stereotype comprising the racist trope of rapacious Black men and classist perceptions of wealth conspicuously displayed through style (Benson, 2012). This discrepancy suggests men who manage men in the sex industry are vulnerable to stigma emanating from the incongruity between attribute (e.g., homosexuality) and stereotype that disqualifies them from hegemonic masculinity, and/or an attribute perceived as universally discrediting (cf. Goffman, 1963)—being a sex industry third party.

Methodology and demographics

This study draws from a large study that interviewed 75 third parties working in the street-based and incall/outcall sectors of the sex industry in Eastern Canada and the erotic dance sector (i.e., mostly strip clubs featuring women and catering to male clients, but inclusive of clubs featuring men and catering to men and/or women) in Ontario only; in semi-structured interviews between 2010 and 2012, respondents were asked to reflect on their current or former work as third parties since 2000 (see Bruckert and Law, 2013). Of these 75 third parties, the vast majority managed female sex workers; only three managed men.

The larger project included sex worker activists and groups in its planning, recruitment, and interviewing stages; however, Bungay et al. (2016) note that such organizations more often cater to women, who represent the majority of sex workers.¹ Reflecting this and the additional impediment of (perceived or felt) antipathy for management in these worker-centered groups, 40 of the 50 incall/outcall third parties

identified as women, of whom many were previously or simultaneously sex workers (Bruckert and Law, 2013). Moreover, in spite of outreach through community networks, online and print publicity, and snowball sampling, concern about stigma and legal risk may limit the involvement of strip club third parties, of whom none from the Maritimes or Québec participated—not only are strip clubs legal yet stigmatized businesses where criminalized acts (e.g., unsanctioned sexual services) may occur, but there are far fewer strip clubs featuring men. This small subsample of three interviews, then, reflects these challenges and the paucity of men working with third parties identified in the literature; nevertheless, it allows for a worthwhile exploration of the particularities of managing men.

For this study, I coded these three interviews separately, using a selection of codes relating to gender, security, risk, legal matters, and stigma. These codes were derived from earlier analyses of project data by sector, as well as the literature, interview guide, theory, and arising from the present subset of data. Quotes appearing in the study are from verbatim transcripts, and those from Andrew and Édouard are translated from French; for confidentiality, all names are pseudonyms.

In terms of demographics, all three are white cis men with substantial sex work experience; Andrew and Édouard are French Canadian. As sex workers, all three serviced men, however, Dex and Andrew, who were both between 20 and 30 years old at the time of the interview, noted they prefer women, while Édouard, who was between 40 and 50 years old, identifies as gay. As third parties, Dex had managed a gay erotic massage parlor and a male strip club; since leaving the strip club, he has worked as a managerial consultant for female strip clubs. Andrew began in the sex industry as a driver and started escorting when an escort failed to show up for an appointment; soon afterward, he opened his own agency. Illustrative of the “retrogressive dynamic” (cf. Escoffier, 2007), after a lengthy career in gay pornography, Édouard could no longer compete with younger performers and instead began using his reputation to market himself as an escort and to arrange appointments for and offer duos with younger men.

Business approaches: Selling masculinity

The business approaches and practices of these three men exhibit some differences from male third parties working with women, but similarities to women managing women, most notably shared experience as a sex worker (see Bruckert and Law, 2013). Indeed all three engaged in third-party work while simultaneously offering their own sexual services to clients. Although he took on a more distanced and managerial role at the strip club, where he oversaw the labor of numerous workers, Dex would tell clients at the relatively smaller and more informal massage parlor, “if you do not find anyone that you like here and you happen to fancy me, I am also available.” The massage parlor Dex managed resembled the male escort agency in Smith et al.’s (2008; Smith and Seal, 2008) research insofar as he maintained a friendly rapport with and among workers and also provided support and mentorship, including “making sure that they were happy” and offering advice “with regards to aesthetics and hygiene.” Similarly, Andrew escorted in addition to doing virtually everything else—including advertising, answering the phone calls,

organizing appointments, and driving—for his agency featuring “men and couples” and also offering “women [and] transsexuals.” Including himself, Andrew’s agency employed 5 to 6 male escorts on a semi-regular basis; he also had a backup driver for times when he was too busy fulfilling all of his other responsibilities.

Notably Édouard was the only person of the 75 third parties in the larger project to unironically and straightforwardly refer to himself as a pimp; in contrast, male agents managing women either problematized or rejected this label (Hannem and Bruckert, 2017). Édouard also noted that his relationship with sex workers is sometimes sexual, reflecting the conflation of romantic partner and exploitative manager characteristic of the pimp stereotype more than some of the male–female agent relationships described by other participants in the research. Unlike Andrew, who like female agencies (see Bruckert and Law, 2013) did not allow escorts to make their own arrangements with agency clients to avoid paying the administrative fee, and who like Dex at the massage parlor set and took a cut of the service rates, Édouard was somewhat flexible in regard to young men he considered “pet[s]”, with whom he would instead “get my cut through sex.” Third-party work was not Édouard’s principal source of income; however, he prioritized his own appointments and client relations over those of his escorts, earning approximately CAD\$200 per day doing calls himself and endeavoring to organize at least one call per day for one of his escorts, earning him CAD\$40 (one cut of one call) per day as a third party.

Across their hiring practices, the influence of “homoerotic prototypes” and hegemonic masculinity is apparent but so too are business-related concerns particular to the abilities of male sex workers. Édouard, for example, required applicants to undergo an audition of sorts: they had to undress so he could see their penis size and if they were muscular (a quality he described as desirable “even if he has a small penis”) and demonstrate that they were capable of getting an erection and ejaculating by masturbating in front of him. This more involved/invasive hiring process stands in contrast to female escort agencies and even indoor agents (i.e., individuals who book appointments and provide security for escorts), among whom auditions are not the norm (Bruckert and Law, 2013). Like Andrew, Édouard kept a variety of men on his roster, naming the student, the bodybuilder, the heterosexual, the Black man, the transvestite, and the youth as desirable “types.” This typology—particularly the separation of Black men from slimmer and/or more feminine types such as the youth and the transvestite and the absence of Asian men—follows Burke’s (2016a) observation that desirable masculinity in the gay community is racialized and privileges heterosexual attributes. While Dex mentioned no specifications in terms of racial presentation, he highlighted a preference for fitness and larger builds, echoing Burke’s (2016a) insistence that hegemonic masculinity sells.

Dex’s hiring process was also more elaborate as compared to female strip clubs, where auditions are rare in Ontario: aspiring dancers “had to put on a [non-nude] two-song audition performance.” Perhaps speaking to concerns about overly aggressive masculinity (see also Scull, 2013)—and reflecting an expectation that dancers (rather than security personnel) would be the ones managing conflicts with customers—Dex also asked prospective dancers how they would handle issues such as a customer refusing to pay.

Whereas Dex and Édouard marketed their businesses through gay networks, as an agency operator offering various gender presentations, Andrew was in a unique position

to engage with hegemonic masculinity—and with it the impact of heterosexual exemplars on men's everyday lives—in his approach to clients:

They were all straight, homophobic heterosexuals who called me, who wanted guys or transsexuals. They were high [...] on coke [...] I get there or the, the transsexuals get there and they go: "Oh, man, what I'm doing right now, it's really fucked. I, uh, don't recognize myself. But it's a trip I had to live out once in my life" and all that. And us, we said: "As far as living out your trip, live it full tilt. Don't just take an hour." So, then, it was like, 8, 900, 1000, 2000, 3000 [...] it was extremely lucrative.

In spite of these lucrative, one-time parties, Andrew conceded that, in general, women have a higher earning potential than male sex workers.

Perceiving and mitigating safety and security risks

In keeping with scholarly observations (see [Scott et al., 2005](#)), Andrew perceived the risk of client violence as generally minimal. Instead, as with participants in [Smith et al. \(2015](#); see also [Smith and Seal, 2008](#)), as both a manager and a worker, Dex was primarily concerned with sexual health risks; however, as neither the strip club nor the massage parlor offered full service (i.e., penetrative and oral sex), his monitoring of workers was to ensure they adhered to the rules. As an escort agency operator Andrew provided condoms, while Édouard was very conscientious about safer sex as a longtime HIV-positive man and would not send a young man who worked for him, "especially if he is seronegative," to clients who did not want to use condoms.

Rather than seeing clients as a risk to his own or his escorts' safety, Édouard perceived his employees as risks to clients but more importantly as risks to himself. He related a story of a young man he recruited on the street—something he sometimes did:

I found him good-looking. [...] And then, um, I said: "I have a client who wants a young man [...] How big are you – 8, 9 inches?" He said: "No, 12." I said: "Damn, alright." I hop into a taxi, and go [to the client's home] with him. He gets there and goes into the kitchen, gets out a knife this big. He says: "Empty your pockets." Pff—I was scared.

The young man stole CAD\$200 from the client, which Édouard had to repay. Given this experience, it is not surprising that Édouard is suspicious of his workers and seldom allows them to host incalls at his home when he is not present.

To mitigate the risk of sex workers trying to exploit him, Édouard maintains an association with "someone who has a big crush on me, like a bodybuilder." He recalled a couple of occasions where he called on his bodybuilder friend for backup, to appear threatening while Édouard talked with problematic workers. As with strip club bouncers ([Law, 2016](#); [DeMichele and Tewksbury, 2004](#)), this strategy relies on the threat of violence via intimidating masculinity rather than the use of violence. In spite of this informal security arrangement (and his own self-identification as a pimp), Édouard's adherence to stereotypes of sinister sex industry third parties was evident in his distrust of

dedicated drivers/security providers, whom he perceived as violent and unpredictable—as he put it, “they are killers” who put his business “in peril.” Practically speaking, he also found it cheaper to send his escorts by taxi.

Édouard’s experience with the escort with the knife was, of course, also dangerous for the client. This was something that appears to have concerned Dex, as visible in the rules he instituted at the strip club: “You do not harass customers or attempt to coerce them into, uh, into something they are not comfortable with, anything that is not conducive of a friendly and unhostile environment.” By contrast, managers at female strip clubs expect women to be demanding “divas” and see “bossy” femininity as an appropriate way to approach male clients (Law, 2016). This discrepancy speaks to a profoundly gendered perception of aggression that makes the “bad girl” desirable yet harmless and the aggressive man a danger.

Despite seeing male sex workers as facing negligible risks of violence, two of the three men who managed men employed some security strategies to protect workers. Dex assumed his workers could manage their own and each other’s safety—the spa “did not have a security officer, but being as that we were all gentlemen, and the nature of the industry is mostly to have gentlemen who are of a larger and more muscular nature, our security was fairly well ensured.” However, there were other security measures, including “video surveillance in all the common areas, audio surveillance in the rooms,” an alarm system, and remotely controlled entry. Dex’s strip club similarly had “video surveillance on the main floor.” Although Dex also implied strippers could defend themselves, the club additionally had provincially licensed security personnel because it served alcohol.

Insofar as he often acted as a driver for his agency, Andrew was also responsible for providing security for his escorts, regardless of gender, which meant occasionally involving himself in physical violence. Andrew was also willing to and occasionally did call the police in crises in which an escort’s life was at risk. As with third parties at female agencies (Bruckert and Law, 2013), this meant taking on significant risks—including arrest, criminal charges, and shuttering the business—that otherwise discourage third parties’ (and sex workers’) reliance on law enforcement for protection, especially if they are racialized immigrants (Lam, 2016; McBride et al., 2020). Perhaps speaking to men’s capacity to defend themselves, suggested by Dex as well as academic researchers (e.g. Ellison and Weitzer, 2017; Smith et al., 2015; Wilcox and Christmann, 2008), Andrew described such situations as involving cis and trans women rather than male sex workers.

More or less? Navigating legal risks

Canada’s adoption of an “end-demand” approach in 2014 that framed commercial sex as exploitation, and criminalized clients and third parties (presumed to be men) but ostensibly not sex workers (presumed to be women), took place after the interviews featured here; however, studies have found this approach has the same deleterious effects on sex workers’ rights and safety as the previous laws, notably through criminalizing the services of third parties and communicating for the purposes of selling sex (McBride et al., 2020). In this context, Andrew avoided talking about sexual acts on the phone with clients, leaving his escorts to negotiate extra services and charges at the appointment—a strategy

common across various sex industry sectors and business types (see [Bruckert and Law, 2013](#)) that downloads sexual health and violence risks onto sex workers.

It is in their experiences with law enforcement that differences between managing men and women become apparent. Although Andrew also managed men, as with the above-noted incident, his interactions with law enforcement were related to female escorts. When driving a female escort, he had been issued a CAD\$1000 ticket for operating an unlicensed taxi by a police officer who suspected but could not prove he was an agency driver. With more women than men on his roster, Andrew had also been subject to suspicion deriving from his supposed association with other elements of the pimp stereotype: he had been wrongfully arrested for employing minors thanks to a bogus accusation called in by a competing agency and was later imprisoned because police, knowing he ran an agency, perceived him to be associated with a cocaine dealer.

Dex was apprehensive about law enforcement and expressed relief about his massage parlor's video and audio surveillance system, of which he always apprised the police, feeling it prevented them from acting "outside of the structure of the law." However, he was subject to considerably less suspicion than Andrew and was never arrested. Indeed, although gendered, Dex's interactions with police at the massage parlor were rather comical:

The police that come in, sometimes, they came undercover. It was usually pretty obvious, regardless. Like, any, any straight cop trying to pretend to be a gay man looking for massage is pretty obvious, right? Um, sometimes, they would even be so as ridiculous as to show up dressed in cowboy hats or, or like leather biker gear. They weren't necessarily as aggressive.

Because sexual acts associated with prostitution are not allowed at strip clubs (at least officially), strip club management does not fall under the catchment of criminalization, rather strip clubs are governed through restrictive municipal regulation and, consequently, subject to scrutiny by police and bylaw officers. It is not surprising, then, that Dex's apprehensions about sex work stigma being exacerbated by homophobia continued at the strip club, where he found this surveillance unpredictable:

Depending on who entered the building in any given time [...] and perhaps their own set of – quote, unquote – morals or ethical standards, i.e. their distaste for the gay populace [...] Sometimes, we were much [more] harshly punished for things. Um, other times, we were left alone in areas where, to be honest, I imagine most of the straight clubs would probably [...] have been enforced.

Thus, it appears that homophobia sometimes precipitated increased attention and punishment, while other times it meant the business and its practices were ignored. In response—and in considerable contrast to opportunistically lax approaches taken at female strip clubs, where third parties seldom enforce bylaws against sexual touching except when municipal inspectors are present ([Law, 2016](#))—Dex's enforcement of municipal regulations was relatively strict. Recognizing dancers earn their pay by soliciting individual clients for CAD\$20 lap dances and may offer more sexual contact for

more money, he fined and suspended dancers whom he caught offering unsanctioned services, reasoning: “It is a lot more profitable to, um, maintain a clean bar, with dancers who are only dancing and giving lap dances that adhere to the law [...] basically no fucking, no sucking, no hand jobs, no orifice contact, et cetera.”

While Dex and Andrew’s interactions with law enforcement were occasioned by the visibility and/or reputation of their businesses, perhaps because his operation was relatively small Édouard had not had elicited police suspicion in relation to his work as a third party. Moreover, whereas homophobia and stigma had informed some of Dex’s interactions with law enforcement, Édouard found that homophobia sometimes intersected with sex work stigma in his personal life.

Mobilizing and managing stigma

All three third parties confronted stigma in the workplace and in their personal lives. Their reflections on the relationship between their work, normative judgment, and gender and sexual scripts demonstrate what [Pinel \(1999\)](#) calls stigma consciousness—the expectation of being stereotyped based on a stigmatized attribute.

Having managed both men and women, Dex and Andrew suggested they were more stigmatized for the latter than the former—something they both related to heteronormative framings of women as sexually vulnerable and men as sexually agentic. Consistent with some of his interactions with police, Andrew suspected people would “think more that I am someone who profits off girls.” Dex, similarly, perceived women’s impressions of him to be conditioned by the absence of common knowledge about male sex work; he insisted “it is abstract to know that I run a male strip club. Most women fancy male strip clubs as being a lot less sketchy [than female strip clubs] and full of like muscly dudes that just kind of dance around in—in bow ties.”

At the same time, Dex recounted assumptions about his sexual preferences and prowess in the gay community, where some people assumed “that I was interested in the gender that I was working with [...] and that somehow I was involved with them. Um, constantly questions about, ‘So, how, how many of these guys have you fucked anyways?’” Édouard, conversely, felt somewhat ostracized in the gay community and that people avoided him when he went out with young men he worked with in the gay village. He also felt more stigmatized as a sex worker, an identity and occupation more prominent for him than his work as a third party: “when you have been a prostitute all your life [...] you are labeled as, as a villain, as someone who—above all a person with AIDS [...] it is really hard.”

Speaking to both stigma consciousness and resilience, their information management strategies (cf. [Goffman, 1963](#)) were informed by various considerations. Among these, the law and concomitant moral judgment featured prominently for Dex:

Everyone knows about my position at [male strip club]. [...] As far as my work at the massage parlour, very few people do. [...] While managing a strip club is a completely legal profession, managing a massage parlour is not [...] I try not to, uh, speak too freely about things I’m doing which are questionably legal. [...] Enough people had trouble with me being

a strip club manager. I can only imagine what some people would have to say about me working, running a massage parlour.

Reflecting the personal nature of decisions involving disclosure, Andrew, who lived with his grandmother during his time as an agency owner, was ‘out’ and had normalized the work to his family. Aware some people may discriminate against him, Édouard disclosed selectively and was more concerned about how homophobia might engender stigma: for example, he would tell his neighbors about his work if they were gay, but “would not tell that to a heterosexual woman who was 80 years old, uh, 60 years old, or that kind of thing. You know, they would treat me as a pederast.”

In the workplace, it appears the dangerousness of the pimp trope sometimes transcends sexuality and racialization. For example, even though he is a white man working at a “gay establishment,” Dex surmised he inspired fear in prospective employees:

There’s initial apprehension from most, uh, most of my employees, um, especially those just getting into the industry. Once they get to know me, they realize I’m just a regular person. But many times when, when I’ve been interviewing potential employees, I find they react to me saying certain things like, “I’m having a really bad day, so I apologize” or whatever with unusual responses, like, “Oh, I certainly don’t want to, you know, make your day any worse, should I, should I just leave? Maybe I’ll come back later.” Something like really over the top like that, you know, like I’m going to stab them in the throat if like my day gets any worse.

In considerable contrast—and illustrating the interrelationship between homophobia, femiphobia, and hegemonic masculinity (Burke, 2016a)—Édouard recounted being called a “fairy” by straight identifying men who sought to work for him, whom he hired anyway because he felt they would be appropriate for heterosexual calls.

While stigma management is often about concealing discrediting attributes (Goffman, 1963), as with their counterparts who manage women (see Law, 2016) sometimes men mobilize stigma to protect themselves or those they manage. For example, Andrew manipulated gender and class stereotypes for his own protection and encouraged his escorts to do the same:

Myself, as an escort, [and] what I suggest to my girls to do as well, uh, I get myself there [to the call]. [...] I pretend to call my driver. [...] if he was starting to get arrogant, I say: “Look [...] there are four 300-pound guys who are waiting in the car.” [...] So then, the person is not too sure or you tell them: “Look, we’re in the Yellow Pages.” [...] you make them believe that, to be in the Yellow Pages, it takes cred, we’re backed, we’re this, we’re that [...] you have the mafia who will come down on you [...] That scares them.

By fostering an impression that his agency would have to be financed by organized crime to afford adult classified advertisements—which have remained costly since moving online²—Andrew mobilized popular assumptions connecting criminal gangs and prostitution to control risky clients through fear. Dex, similarly, admitted the pimp stereotype “sometimes works to my benefit when I have to deal with [...] a client being inappropriate

and/or refusing to pay. But I try not to abuse that because it is also, you know, building into the stereotype, which I would prefer not to do.”

Comparing third parties’ different ways of engaging with stereotypes suggests that their ability to do so is shaped by other factors in addition to stigma: for Andrew, it was organizational type and size—since clients contact but do not visit outcall agencies, he relied on clients’ assumptions about the size of his operation and the people behind it; as an incall (massage parlor) and strip club manager who interacted with clients, it appears Dex’s presentation of self was consistent enough with clients’ impressions of nefariousness (cf. Goffman, 1959); but Édouard’s apparent inability to convey hegemonic masculinity to straight or violent escorts suggests there is a limit to the applicability (and in turn fearsomeness) of the pimp or gangster in homoerotic contexts.

Conclusion

As Dex, Édouard, and Andrew’s narratives evince, hegemonic masculinity, homophobia, and heteronormativity inform how they organize their business and security practices and perceive and experience regulation and stigma. Interestingly, their normative perceptions of male sex workers’ masculinity appears to relieve some of the pressure to enact tough, aggressive masculinity felt by managers and bouncers at female strip clubs (Law, 2016). However, these third parties also mobilize stereotypes of pimps and organized crime or tough masculinity in the name of security and prefer to hire conventionally attractive men, perpetuating hegemonic masculinity. It is also notable that all three themselves serviced men even though only Édouard is gay, reflecting Benson’s (2012) argument that pimps are more sexually fluid than stereotypes suggest, and further suggesting they are vulnerable to homophobia in addition to stigmas attached to the sex industry. At the same time, Dex and Édouard benefitted from the incongruity of the pimp stereotype with homosexuality insofar as they at least occasionally avoided or experienced only minimal scrutiny from regulatory authorities. Thus, small sample size notwithstanding, the gendered analysis in this study reveals that heteronormativity and gender scripts condition the experiences of and risks faced by men who manage men quite significantly and distinctly from third parties who manage women. More specifically, when it comes to risk among men in the sex industry—whether of violence, discrimination, or stigma—hegemonic masculinity and its concomitant gender and sexual scripts that fuse masculine desirability to aggression can be solutions, albeit to problems they also engender.

These findings also highlight male sex workers’ vulnerability to workplace risks and inequities. Assumptions that men can defend themselves or are more dangerous than clients may inform minimal safety measures that leave male sex workers unnecessarily vulnerable to client violence and mean they get less value for the administrative fees paid to third parties than do female sex workers. The informality of practices like Édouard’s sexual interactions with his workers also suggests workplace sexual harassment may be rationalized or minimized through business considerations unique to male sex work (like the importance of erection). To this end, future research could compare third party to male sex worker perspectives—a line of inquiry arguably rendered more urgent in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, in which strippers have

argued that third parties' implementation of health protection measures has been inadequate and inequitable (WSTS, 2020). In turn, following Schensul and LeCompte (2013, qtd in Bungay et al., 2016), a research project that defines the target group as men who manage and work for men from the outset, rather than third parties generically, may precipitate a larger and more diverse sample.

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Notes

1. In a quantitative study by Benoit et al. (2020), women comprised 76% of sex workers, men 17%, and trans persons 7%. The relative paucity of male sex workers to manage could be an additional reason for the scarcity of third parties working with men, contributing to the difficulty of recruiting such individuals for research.
2. Having moved from print to online, the Yellow Pages terminated its Escort Services advertisements after the introduction of Canada's new prostitution laws. In a context of increasing international end-demand legislation and censorship, new online adult services classified sites have emerged, including Leolist, Tryst, and Slix. Like print classifieds, they are quite costly—to post a basic ad and have it bumped to the front page 3 times per day for a week on Leolist Toronto costs approximately CAD\$150.

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