



You Catch More Flies With Honey: Sex Work, Violence, and Masculinity on the Streets¹

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Violence among inner-city men is a pressing social concern, and the central focus of much academic research. Many frame it as a phenomenon that certain men perpetuate—those who inhabit disadvantaged, impoverished communities—and argue it is linked to performances of “street” masculinity. In this article, I examine male street-based sex workers’ willingness to become embroiled in violent exchanges. In a departure from theoretical predictions, my findings reveal these men expend considerable effort to remain nonviolent with others immersed in the sex trade, a decision based upon their desire for the acquisition of capital as well as their calculation of risks. In doing so, they construct and perform a nuanced version of masculinity, which I call pacifist masculinity. Few studies analyze peaceful and conciliatory interactions among men in these contexts, an absence that only serves to reify assumptions about rampant hostility and aggression. I draw on interviews with 19 men involved in street prostitution in Chicago in 2012. This article contributes to a clearer understanding of male–male violence in high-risk environments, examines the prominent factors that inform decisions to assault others, and explores how such actions challenge hegemonic masculinity.

KEY WORDS: crime; masculinities; risk; sex workers; street; violence.

INTRODUCTION

Sociological and criminological studies attribute the etiology of violence to a variety of factors, including structural barriers to success, lack of social controls that regulate communities, and social and cultural forces (Anderson 1999; Harding 2010; Venkatesh 2000). Some scholars argue that men who inhabit marginalized settings are especially likely to partake in violence (Stewart and Simons 2006), while others shed light on the divergent practices among men within these neighborhoods (Abelson 2014; Harding 2010; Newman 1999; Weenink 2015).³ It is well documented that “street people” (Anderson 1999)—participants in criminal and underground markets—draw on violence as a tool to carry out illicit tasks in order to increase their social and economic capital (Contreras 2013; Horowitz 1983; Newburn and Stanko 1994). Mullins (2006) and others consider willingness to participate in violence a defining feature of hegemonic street masculinity.

In this article, I examine violence among a group of men engaged in street-based prostitution in a major U.S. city. Given that sex work is largely perceived as a

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³ There is a small but growing body of research that investigates women’s participation in violence in disadvantaged contexts (see, e.g., Jones 2009). This article focuses exclusively on men’s physical conflict.

feminine occupation, Kong (2009) finds that male sex workers implement strategies to resuscitate their manhood. Drawing on past research, it is no stretch to anticipate that men engaged in this trade go to great lengths to demonstrate or “prove” their masculinity through aggressive talk and actions in accordance with street mandates. In a departure from theoretical predictions, however, my analysis reveals a majority of these men expend considerable effort to remain nonviolent, a decision based upon their desire for the acquisition of capital as well as their calculation of risks. I specifically examine their encounters with other men immersed in the street sex market (customers and fellow sex workers), as such interactions unfold within their occupational milieu.

Because the male sex workers in this sample are generally unwilling to assault other men, I argue this reflects their allegiance to and construction of an alternative form of masculinity, which I call *pacifist masculinity*. I define pacifist masculinity as a gendered performance that encompasses behaviors primarily oriented toward occupational success, many of which are antithetical to street masculinity, including a refusal to initiate violence, avoidance of physical skirmishes, and reliance on subtle strategies to “manage” others in order to deescalate conflict. This masculinity emerges within the field of sex work, uniquely tailored to the circumstances and conditions that surround it. It is not a passive approach per se, but one that men intentionally implement in order to enhance their capital. My data also suggest that performances of violence and masculinity are not static, and there is some variation across contexts.

Violence does not occur in a social vacuum and scholars must take into account how external factors intersect with in-the-moment foreground factors to facilitate acts of aggression (Contreras 2013). To that end, I argue that men’s participation in sex work—an activity constrained by the legal, economic, and social conditions that surround the trade—compels them to practice pacifist masculinity. I draw on a sample of adult male street-based sex workers, a stigmatized population in the United States typically embedded within disadvantaged environments. Not only are men vastly understudied *vis-à-vis* female sex workers (Weitzer 2005), but they offer an ideal opportunity to better understand how masculinity is performed, modified, and adapted to suit particular lifestyles.

Much of the recent research on men in the sex trade focuses on high-end escorts and indoor workers to the neglect of those situated in outdoor markets (Minichiello and Scott 2014). The fleeting and exposed nature of street work often generates increased risks for participants, and empirical studies indicate there are high rates of physical assault among this population (Koken and Bimbi 2014; Mimiaga et al. 2009; Valera, Sawyer, and Schiraldi 2001). Surprisingly, scholars rarely investigate workers’ responses to it. This analysis relies on rich qualitative data, which was a pivotal methodology to illuminate how external factors shaped decision-making processes regarding violent practices. I conducted 19 semistructured interviews with male sex workers in Chicago during July 2012. I used comparative case coding to ascertain the predominant patterns, and I subsequently employed deviant case analysis to explain the contrary actions of two individuals.

GENDER PERFORMANCES, INTERACTIONS, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The construction of gender is an omnipresent force that significantly colors the behavior of social actors. Connell (2002) offers a detailed conceptualization of how gender shapes action and thought at the macro, meso, and micro levels. While the gender order operates on the macro level, determining privilege and status across institutions and social structures, gender regimes set the precedence for meso-level gender interactions as they unfold within organizations, social networks, and communities. Regimes are established within certain environments and vary across social location. Gender relations refer to the micro-level interactions, where gender is continually (re)produced and maintained, often upholding gender regimes and order. The concept of gender relations is akin to “doing gender,” or how individuals accomplish gender within particular contexts and the extent to which they are held accountable for their performances by others (Fenstermaker, West, and Zimmerman 1991; Hollander 2013).

Influenced by normative rules regarding gender, individuals generally feel compelled to express themselves as proficiently masculine or feminine for fear of suffering repercussions (Jenness and Fenstermaker 2014). The creation of particular gender displays result in hierarchies of masculinities and femininities for any given setting. It follows that the most valued version becomes hegemonic, as is the case with masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). The hegemonic construction is the top of this ranking order and remains so as the result of comparison with other forms that confer lower status and value unto men who practice them (Mullins 2008). Subordinate forms of masculinity fall short because they are situationally constructed as “aberrant and deviant” to hegemonic versions (Messerschmidt 2014).

Because masculinity and femininity are constructed as oppositional, men’s engagement with feminine tasks, actions, or causes generally call into question their manhood (Bridges 2010). However, a growing number of recent studies reveal the emergence of a hybrid masculinity, which combines aspects of hegemonic, marginalized/subordinated masculinities, and even femininities. This “softer and more sensitive” style of masculinity helps shed light on changes in masculine practices and performances (Messner 2007), but it appears to develop primarily among privileged groups of men (see Barber 2008; Bridges 2014; Messner 1993).

Men involved in street-based sex work are already disenfranchised from conventional society, and clearly not a privileged population. Therefore, participation in this “feminine occupation” further cements their subordinate masculinity. Certain men may not be well equipped to enact the locally prevailing hegemonic ideal—in this case street masculinity—thus making improvisation necessary (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). This is the case for male sex workers who construct a nuanced form tailored to their work conditions and social position.

Despite the abundance of research that assesses the ways in which men attempt to accomplish and conform to hegemonic masculinity (e.g., Stewart and Simons 2006; Wilkinson 2004), there is sparse investigation of their deliberate nonadherence and the motivations that fuel this decision. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) call for scholars to further investigate how and under what conditions hegemonic

masculinity may be challenged, contested, and even changed. This article aims to address this query.

MALE VIOLENCE IN DISADVANTAGED CONTEXTS

There is a long history of research that examines crime and violence within urban contexts of concentrated disadvantage. Many academic studies and official crime statistics uphold the overarching narrative that male aggression is widespread in such settings.⁴ Yet upon closer scrutiny, the reality of impoverished, inner-city communities and those who populate them is much more complex. While some indeed commit violence, there are also folks that condemn and reject such behavior. Therefore, it is important to note the divergent cultural models that are connected to varying degrees of involvement in street conflicts (see Anderson 1999; Harding 2010; Newman 1999). One model is conventional whereas individuals adhere to legitimate work, mainstream values, and law abidance; they ultimately tend not to participate in fights. The other model reflects a contrary set of values that promulgate physical violence and crime as a means to acquire status, respect, and money. Anderson (1999) calls adherents to the two models “decent” and “street” families, respectively. Street folks are often embedded in criminal networks engaged in a variety of illicit activities, such as carjackings, robbery, and drug dealing (Contreras 2013; Mullins 2006; Wright and Decker 1994).

One cannot fully comprehend this cultural variation without linking it to broader social structures. Disadvantaged neighborhoods are spaces where inhabitants experience significant structural inequalities due to racism, discrimination, poverty, and limited public services (Anderson 1999). Macro theories offer explanations that illuminate why certain individuals may be more likely to partake in crimes and violence within these contexts, including blocked opportunities (Merton 1938) and social disorganization (Kornhauser 1978; Shaw and McKay 1969). Violence can then exacerbate isolation between neighbors and contribute to fears of personal victimization, which can exacerbate a breakdown of informal social controls (Venkatesh 2000). As previously noted, this does not mean that all men will embrace street lifestyles as a result of their social location, but recognition of the structural conditions better illuminates why certain individuals take this path.

Contreras (2013) makes a compelling case that scholars should further consider the link between structural factors and cultural/contextual circumstances, which ultimately influence illegal activities. Studies that focus on men involved in crimes find they are likely to perform a type of masculinity—hegemonic street masculinity—that places a premium on respect and the use of physical aggression to cultivate it (Contreras 2013; Messerschmidt 2014; Mullins 2006; Stewart and Simons 2006). This masculinity is not only aligned with the code of the streets but persists as des-

⁴ As one reviewer cautioned, scholars should be wary of using arrest rates to make broad claims about patterns of violence. Police bias and intensive surveillance of poor, urban minority men are likely to produce this outcome and sustain a particular narrative (Goffman 2014). Rather than draw on official statistics, I situate this article within the abundant empirical qualitative research that concludes violence and aggression are key in the lives of men enmeshed in criminal street activities (Contreras 2013; Horowitz 1983; Messerschmidt 2014; Mullins 2006; Wright and Decker 1994).

perate people become “mired in an outlaw culture that becomes legitimate to its adherents because the wider system has little legitimacy [to them]” (Anderson 1999:230). Collins (2008) explains street masculinity is a front-stage performance that includes visual appearance, an aggressive style of talk, and a demonstration of one’s ability to be violent.

Socially marginalized men may utilize street masculinity to secure important forms of capital in their localized environment (Reich 2010). Violent presentations of self then can be a way for them to elevate their status in this context (Dance 2002; Katz 1988). Street-based crimes are frequently carried out in conjunction with physical force, both of which can confer benefits unto initiators, including the acquisition of various types of capital. Thus, these gains may overshadow the risks when it comes to decisions regarding assault (Wright and Decker 1994).

Negative consequences for transgressing prescribed gender practices in a setting can affect one’s participation in violent attacks as well. Gender accountability is a powerful force that compels men to justify deviations from normative expectations, or risk being viewed as feminine, subordinate, or a “punk” (Dance 2002; Mullins 2006). Those who subscribe to street masculinity place stock in maintaining one’s personal reputation at all costs. Securing respect is central to this form of masculinity and any challenge can hasten violence in order to set right a perceived wrong and save face (Polk 1994). It is clear that the masculine self is about exerting control over others and resisting being controlled (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009).

Extant research reveals numerous factors that influence male youth’s decisions to engage in fights within disadvantaged communities, including strength of neighborhood identification, city rivalries, location, personal identity, and ability to “code-switch” (see Anderson 1999; Cobbina, Miller, and Brunson 2008; Harding 2010; McCarthy and Hagan 2005). Indeed, Horowitz (1983) finds that male gang members’ propensity to attack another man aligns with constructed identities attached to honor: self-image promoters, self-image defenders, or reputation avoiders. While the above studies focus on adolescent men, they also provide a springboard to analyze how adult men involved in criminal lifestyles make decisions about physical conflict. One study on adult male criminals asserts they spend little time weighing the pros and cons of attacking another in the offending moment because they perceive the opportunity as fleeting (Jacobs, Topalli, and Wright 2003). In short, they commit violent acts if and when it seems advantageous.

Building off previous research that claims men dispense violence because it fortifies their masculinity and boosts capital, this article examines the case of sex workers to further tease out how participants in street crime make decisions about aggression. The research questions that guide this analysis are as follows: In what ways do the conditions surrounding outdoor sex work influence one’s willingness to participate in physical violence? And do these actions influence performances and constructions of masculinity? Such findings offer new insights into how men perceive and interpret their own circumstances and opportunities (Clarke and Cornish 1985).

CASE SELECTION, DATA, AND RESEARCH METHODS

To better understand the relationship men in disenfranchised settings have with violence, I use the case of male street sex workers. They are a population that commits illegal acts and much of their work transpires in public, high-risk contexts. I accessed this population through a nonprofit organization that exclusively serves men involved in street prostitution, which I call A Lift Up (ALU).⁵ This program is located in Chicago, a city known for its abundance of neighborhoods steeped in crime, violence, and poverty.⁶ When the program first started in 1990, it consisted of street outreach and services administered to men involved in prostitution. In 1993, ALU additionally opened a drop-in center in a crime-ridden neighborhood of the city—one also known for its abundance of social services—where men could receive services during designated times. At this center, male sex workers have access to a variety of provisions and resources, including a hearty lunch served daily at noon; showers and laundry facilities; informal counseling by staff members; mail, phone, and computer services; the acquisition of clothing; fellowship; residential and employment referrals; and occasional educational presentations and topical group sessions. Men are expected to abide by the program rules when they visit: if they engage in violent behaviors, sex, or drug use at the site, they receive warnings and/or are barred from returning. There was no limit on the frequency of visitation, which resulted in a number of regular clients who showed up most week days.⁷ ALU is a religious-based program that is funded primarily by private donations, yet it does occasionally receive grants for special projects.

I was a known researcher and volunteer at this program for one full month during summer 2012. I attended the program five to six days per week and spent approximately six hours per visit, timed to correspond to the hours in which the program was open for services. In total, my field immersion comprised 132 hours at ALU. It was important to be a daily presence in order to quickly establish rapport with clients in this short time frame, to earn their trust, and boost the chances they would participate in the study. During my fieldwork, I helped prepare meals, cleaned up dishes, conversed with clients and staff members, completed menial tasks (e.g., helped organize the food pantry), sat in on group sessions, conducted interviews, and prepared a final report of my findings upon exit.

During this period, I interviewed 19 men involved in street-level prostitution who visited ALU. Participation in the study was voluntary, as I asked each individual if he was willing to be interviewed about his experiences in sex work and the violence within the trade. The staff members left me to arrange interviews without any intervention; they did not encourage or discourage clients to participate, so there were no “consequences” for refusing to do so. After completion of the interview, I provided a \$20 Target gift card as compensation for his time. Each digitally

⁵ A pseudonym is used for the program, agreed upon as a condition of my access to conduct research.

⁶ In 2012, during the year of my data collection, Chicago was ranked the murder capital of the United States (Wilson 2013).

⁷ Men were allowed to eat and shower, relax in the shared space, and have fellowship with others daily. There were restrictions placed on how often they could do laundry, acquire used clothing, or use the computer/telephone.

recorded interview lasted approximately one hour and the questions were intended to elicit thick descriptions regarding entry into prostitution, risks and benefits of the trade, experiences with violence, strategies to manage violence, codes of conduct on the streets, relationships with other men, their evaluation of ALU, whether prostitution impacted their health, desistance, and basic demographic information. Interviews were integral to this analysis as they enabled unanticipated findings to emerge (Westervelt and Cook 2007), such as their reluctance to engage in violence with other men.

I conducted the interviews in a private room in the center that was away from staff members and other clients. I assigned pseudonyms to each participant in this study, which was a concern many shared given their fear of criminalization and stigmatization. I also completed semistructured interviews with three ALU staff members (two men and one woman), including an outreach coordinator, assistant center director, and center director. For these interviews, I asked questions about the program, its history and mission, experiences and struggles of clientele, program rules and discipline, and success.

Table I includes the characteristics of male sex workers, such as age, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, and duration of time engaged in prostitution. The men included in this sample ranged in age from 25 to 51, with a mean age of 42, and they were all cisgender.

Most of the clients who regularly visited ALU were African American, and therefore my sample reflects this composition with 17 African American men (89%) and 2 Hispanic men (11%). ALU exclusively served adult males with a history of prostitution, which staff members confirmed during a brief intake questionnaire the first time he visited the center. In addition to age and race/ethnicity, I asked participants to classify their sexual orientation (gay, bisexual, or straight) given they may engage in sex with a variety of partners, including straight or gay men and women.

Table I. Sample Characteristics

Name	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Sexual Identity	Involvement (Years)
Jamal	40	African American	bisexual	15
Blue	34	African American	straight	8
Steve	43	African American	bisexual	20
Juan	35	Hispanic	bisexual	8
Ben	47	African American	gay	20
David	45	African American	gay	20
Abdul	40	African American	gay	6
DeShawn	37	African American	gay	4
Daryl	47	African American	gay	25
Terrell	42	African American	bisexual	20
Bobbie	51	African American	bisexual	10
Scott	49	African American	straight	35
Jordan	25	African American	straight	4
Miguel	42	Hispanic	gay	5
Rich	47	African American	gay	20
Martin	46	African American	straight	10
Jay	41	African American	straight	20
Calvin	48	African American	bisexual	22
Omar	43	African American	bisexual	19

As confirmed by the participants in this study, a majority of the customers of male sex workers are men (Logan 2010). Male sex workers in this sample reported their sexual identity as follows: seven gay (37%), seven bisexual (37%), and five straight (26%). The average tenure in sex work was 15 years, yet almost all the men cited at least one or more brief period of cessation at some point.

To gain theoretical leverage, the interviews were designed to better understand interactions between men involved in prostitution and how they performed masculinities together (Martin 2001), particularly as it is connected to violence. The analysis of interview data was an inductive process, one that draws on grounded theory and the constant comparative method (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2008; Glaser and Strauss 1967). I used Dedoose qualitative software to aid in the creation and application of thematic codes to the interviews mirroring those established in the questionnaire. I then read through the interviews a second time in order to apply more specific codes that encompassed greater detail beyond the broad themes. For example, if a selection was initially coded “responses to violence,” I went through and devised additional codes that encompassed all the ways in which men reacted—fight back, use weapons, peacemaker, talk to pacify, flee, and so forth. After reviewing this more-complex coding system, I was able to ascertain general patterns of behavior among this population, and acquired insight into the reasons they avoided or perpetuated it.

When I identified data that did not fit these overarching patterns, however, I did not simply expand my codes to incorporate them as grounded theory would suggest. Rather, I used negative or deviant case analysis, which involves drawing attention to instances of empirical data that run contrary to theoretical expectations (Pearce 2002). Past studies on crime have used this method to offer explanations for decisions about offending and longevity of criminal trajectories (Piquero, Sullivan, and Farrington 2010). Providing explanations for such deviant cases allowed me to further refine my argument and strengthen it.

MALE SEX WORKERS’ REPUDIATION OF VIOLENCE

A man’s inclination to dole out violence has implications for his masculinity, particularly when immersed within environments where manhood is tied to physical alacrity (Anderson 1999; Mullins 2006). Harding (2010) posits individuals self-segregate within neighborhoods according to their activities: those who commit illegal actions spend much of their time in high crime and violent settings. This is the case for men involved in street prostitution, where a bulk of their daily interactions unfold in geographical areas known for solicitation as well as other types of criminal activities. Past work suggests violence is frequent in the street-level sex trade and among its workers (Bimbi 2007; Dennis 2008; Mimiaga et al. 2009); therefore one must continually attempt to manage it.

Due to an awareness of the low status sex work confers unto them, Kong (2009) posits male sex workers employ tactics to attain hegemonic masculinity. In contrast, I find a majority of male sex workers refute hegemonic mandates when they refuse to assault other men immersed in the sex trade scene. They tend to go to

great lengths to avoid physical confrontations because they perceive there is little to gain from such embroilment and much to lose. There are two primary conditions tied to street-based sex work that undergird decisions to remain nonviolent: (1) violence hurts business prospects, and (2) violence elevates risks they face. These considerations inform decision-making processes and ultimately result in what many would categorize as “feminine” behaviors. Male sex workers embrace nonviolence and enact a pacifist form of masculinity because it ultimately elevates their social, cultural, and economic capital.

Clashes Impede Business Opportunities

It is well documented that many men in disadvantaged settings, and especially those who commit street crimes, use violence as a resource to attain status and earnings. While male street sex workers also have similar desire to acquire capital, they make different decisions about participating in violent altercations. Men who perform other crimes (e.g., theft, carjacking, drug dealing) are largely motivated to do so for financial gain. This is likewise one of the biggest incentives for involvement in sex work (Bimbi 2007; Lucas 2004). Almost every participant in this study cited limited job prospects and money as the key reason for their engagement; it was also the biggest benefit of the work. Bobbie emphasized the financial rewards: “Money, big money when you don’t throw it away and you can really just do things with it. I can make up to \$1,500 a week.” Terrell stated, “Quick cash is *the* benefit,” and Omar concurred: “The positive thing was I was able to pay my bills.” As the above statements imply, earning money via sex transactions was a way to accomplish temporary financial independence, a boon to a man’s self-esteem. As a group, they exerted much energy to secure and maximize profits.

A majority of men in this sample (89%) framed altercations with male customers or other male sex workers as counterproductive to this key. Rich was acutely aware of customer perceptions as they affected the livelihood of his business. In this discussion, he noted that clients were easily spooked when sex workers showed any indication they were willing to become aggressive. One marker of this was carrying weapons, so Rich deliberately eschewed them to make customers feel more comfortable and secure the transaction: “No, I never carry weapons because clients are so cautious of people. Johns will even ask you if you have one on you. That’s the reason I don’t have them ‘cuz it would scare them off.” Martin provided a similar rationale about weapons: “No. Because it’s like if you carry a weapon it mean you looking for something [trouble]. Customers don’t like that.” Calvin explained his nonviolent approach with clients: “I’m already getting paid up front for it, so I didn’t need issues. I didn’t need someone not to come back to me because they say, ‘Well, the sex was good, but you’re that robber, you violent, no.’ I want them to keep coming back.” Juan lambasted other men who assaulted clients because they hurt everyone’s business prospects: “Some prostitutes go with the customers and they’ll steal and harm. So the customers get this impression that every prostitute. . . they done it. And it’s a bad reputation really for ones that don’t do that, like me. So it’ll be less money or they’ll be afraid to go with you or whatever.” Messerschmidt

(1993:74) summarizes this practice: “Individuals construct their actions in relation to how they might be interpreted by others in the particular social context in which they occur.” Altogether, these comments suggest that signaling nonaggression to clients was a strategic business practice used by male sex workers.

Not only were sex workers concerned about how they came across to prospective customers, but they also recognized that diplomatic interactions with fellow sex workers could open doors of opportunity for them. Even in situations where they were threatened, they espoused it was best to defuse volatile situation and resolve things peacefully. Jamal explained the perks of using a reconciliatory approach with others in the field, a practice he used to access claimed territories. He offered gifts (e.g., drugs) and engaged in friendly conversations to mollify sex workers: “My first thing to do was to get you high, and make you my friend so then you’ll let me stand next to you out there on the corner. And the more I become your friend, you’ll say, ‘Oh, go and get that [customer] right there.’ You know so that was good for me and I didn’t have to worry about getting beat down.”

Another illustration of how participants prioritized business interests over violence is found in Omar’s approach on the streets. He believed it behooved him to befriend others in the trade and used verbal methods to procure peaceful resolutions to physical scuffles. Omar instrumentally and routinely placated other sex workers to dodge violence and continually earn money. He explained to me, “Yeah, some guys take others’ tricks, some try to do stuff like that. I was mainly friends with everyone, though, so I could hang out anywhere and didn’t have problems. I tell them there’s enough money for everybody, so there’s no need to get upset. If they’d try to start something physical, I’d talk to them to fix the situation.” Due to this interactional style, certain men were free to roam geographically, which allowed them to solicit customers in territories “claimed” by others to enhance profits. By influencing others’ perceptions of them (shifting from competitor to friend), they minimized personal harm and entanglement in fights. This nonviolent practice runs contrary to the actions of most male street offenders in these locations who are likely to use brute force to execute crimes and boost masculine capital. According to the directives of street masculinity, the diplomatic techniques used by male sex workers position them as punks or effeminate (Anderson 1999; Mullins 2006).

Engagement in Fights Amplifies Risk

Anyone who participates in physical assaults experiences heightened risk of criminalization. It is often the case that street-based crimes, violence, and notions of masculinity become interwoven in such a fashion that the benefits of aggression seem to overshadow the negative consequences that can potentially result. My data indicate male street sex workers do not garner similar perks for propensity to engage in violent exchanges with other men. In addition to claims that it is bad for business, they contend involvement in such altercations amplifies multiple risks they face—such as criminalization and stigmatization—making it an undesirable practice. Not only do they refrain from doling out violence, but they also strive to defuse

volatile interactions and use various techniques to generate peaceful resolutions to conflict.

Male sex workers tend to practice nonviolence with other men because they recognize participation in brawls could exacerbate their own criminalization and stigmatization. Physical fights create a scene in public spaces, draw the attention of police, and potentially subject those involved to apprehension. Although violence is integral in the execution of other types of street crime, this population viewed such exchanges as an unnecessary and avoidable risk not vital to their performance of sex work. They also recognized that any interaction with police can reveal their involvement in the trade, which warrants an additional criminal offense.

Martin revealed the potential for violence was omnipresent, yet he made a concerted effort to eschew such encounters due to fear about legal and punitive repercussions. He illuminated his decision-making process: “You know I don’t think me hurting somebody and taking a chance to go to the joint for the rest of my life. . . that just wasn’t worth the risk. I know a lot of guys doing a whole lot of time for hurting a trick real bad. They gone for life.” When a fight appeared imminent, he tried to dampen tension by talking, and if unsuccessful, would flee the scene due to concerns about police involvement.

Even though he admitted the temptation to assault a difficult customer occurs, Jordan’s awareness of the collateral damage kept his own aggression at bay. One of his biggest fears was incarceration: “I worry about going to jail. Not necessarily just for prostitution itself, but for assault, too. There were times when I wanted to use a blunt object on a client. I worry about hurting somebody to get their money. So the biggest threat for me I’d probably say is law, well actually having the police called and being arrested because of my violent actions. I haven’t ever done that, though.” Jordan’s assessment of risk of incarceration curbed his behavior.

During the following conversation, Juan categorized himself as a peacemaker, partly fueled by his aversion to police and punishment:

Interviewer: What is likely to incite violence from clients?

Juan: When they are high and they won’t pay you, and you get angry. They tell you to leave or you will get hurt.

Interviewer: How do you respond?

Juan: I’m not violent with them. . . I’m a real peaceful person. So I will try and charm my way out of the situation and flee.

Interviewer: Why do you do that?

Juan: Because I don’t want to get caught by the police.

Jay expressed a similar concern, which engendered docile responses to aggressive acts committed by sex workers:

Jay: There have been a couple cock-block situations. Other prostitutes they’d try to come up and take your customers.

Interviewer: What would you do in that situation?

Jay: I'd get upset, but I wouldn't say anything about it. I would just let it happen. I try not get physical while I'm out there. I didn't want to create a scene on the street, get the police to get involved. I didn't want to go to jail.

In addition to criminalization, risks also included stigmatization and harassment, especially by male officers. Indeed, this population experiences the double stigma of perceived homosexuality *and* commercial sex (Vanwesenbeeck 2013). Despite the diversity of reported sexual identities among this sample, the men consistently sustained substantial mistreatment, harassment, and scorn from police officers because they sold sex to men. As Messerschmidt (1993) points out, heterosexuality is perhaps the most fundamental marker of "maleness" and those who deviate from it (or appear to) are ridiculed and repressed. Male sex workers tried to avoid stigma, as well as the negative emotions of shame and embarrassment, by minimizing contact with police officers.

Even in situations where they were attacked, sex workers rarely considered law enforcement as a viable resource. Both the illegality of the work and concern about stigmatization fueled this reluctance. When asked if they ever sought out police after an assault, the men collectively expressed a strong aversion to do so. Based on past experiences, Jamal claimed officers offer no help and instead demean him for his involvement in prostitution. The result of such interactions left him struggling with feelings of self-loathing:

They wouldn't listen to me, wouldn't do anything about the crimes against me. They kind of hate prostitutes. The number one reason I avoid them is shame. I mean how can a young man walk up on a police officer and tell them that you'd been raped or that he's been beaten by a john? They'd say, "Well, you're a male. What the hell's wrong with you? Why you doing this anyway?"

This type of mistreatment provided even greater incentive for him to steer clear of street altercations.

David explained how he generally practiced nonviolence even when others incited it: "You plan not to be aggressive if something goes wrong. You plan to accept whatever shortfall might come up when dealing with others." When probed for greater insight into the reason behind this choice, he discussed stigma as well: "I don't trust the police. For some reason, there's a stereotype against us with the judicial system of protection. They feel you're gay, you put yourself in this situation when you get hurt, and you deserve it. It's probably just a stigma of giving you a hard time because your lifestyle is a prostitute." According to the street code, refusal of payment would justify violent retaliation as it is perceived as an affront to one's manhood. Yet, in this scenario, Calvin still refused to execute it: "I won't do anything to them. I let it go." Even if he were victimized, he would not seek out police assistance: "I could never go to police if I was hurt. I would be too embarrassed and worried they would arrest me. They would say, 'Oh, you're a prostitute, so you're going to have to expect things like that to be done to you.'"

Harboring distrustful views of police is not specific to sex workers as it is well documented among members of disadvantaged communities. In certain circles, it is viewed as a sign of weakness to utilize law enforcement, especially to settle disputes (Rosenfeld, Jacobs, and Wright 2003). Due to the stigma associated with male-male prostitution (and presumed homosexuality), interactions with officers can lead to

substantial condemnation and harassment on top of criminalization. Therefore, street sex workers feel consistent enactment of nonviolent actions can help mitigate the possibility that such consequences come to fruition.

SEX WORK FACILITATES PACIFIST MASCULINITY

Both of the anonymous reviewers asked whether there is a self-selection bias among male sex workers: Do those who already practice a pacifist masculinity have a greater tendency to become sex workers? Or, is it the engagement in the sex trade that affects their subsequent embracement and performance of pacifist masculinity? While it is difficult to firmly establish causation within qualitative projects, my data suggests it is the latter. Overall, participants indicate that being a sex worker indeed altered their willingness to act aggressively, at least with other men involved in this scene. At the same time, a few did admit they occasionally fought with men in the broader community who posed a threat to them.

During the course of our interview, Abdul shared that he used to have a tendency to get in physical scuffles when he was younger, prior to his entrance into street work: “When I was younger, I used to get in a lot of trouble, fights. I used to carry a little knife or a box cutter with me. . . .” Upon becoming a sex worker, he briefly toted a knife but clarified he never used it on another man embedded in the sex trade. It was reserved for others who intended to harm him: “No, I never used it on others in the scene. . . . I mainly had it for guys in the neighborhood, because they’re quick to jump on somebody.” Abdul generally relied on peaceful methods to contend with aggressive customers or sex workers, including fleeing at the first signs of an attack and going out of his way to befriend other workers.

Like Abdul, other sex workers would occasionally assault men outside of the scene. They were quick to differentiate between interactions with those affiliated with the sex trade and those disconnected from it. The following exchange with Ben illustrates the notion that one should uniformly remain peaceful during all business-related transactions:

Interviewer: Do you ever initiate fights with others?

Ben: Sometimes I will have to fight.

Interviewer: What would it be over?

Ben: As far as being out there in the scene? No, I take that back. While at work, I don’t fight. But as far as everywhere else, just hanging out, it could happen [if I’m messed with]. See, I don’t mix business and fighting together.

During a conversation with Jordan it was evident that he, too, was willing to throw down when threatened by individuals disconnected from sex work. When asked to provide an example, he recounted the following events:

This guy was constantly hounding a buddy of mines for some money because of the fact that he got him high. And the guy, who is a gangster, been hounding him for months. My friend, Keith, kept constantly telling him “I’ll have your money” but didn’t pay. So eventually it escalates and the guy came up to my friend and slapped a sandwich out his hand. The guy takes a swing at Keith, and some people broke them apart. So that’s when I stepped in, and me and

the gangster got to fighting. It ends, but we see this guy at the library the next day. Keith goes into the library, and I just stay outside because. . . I'm not the best fighter, but I'm just not going to sit up there and run away from you. So [gangster] dude was like "Why don't we just go ahead and finish what we started?" He punched me in my mouth, and I'm basically wrestling with him, hit him a few times. It was one of those things. . . I'm thinking, I fought you before, if you want to fight again, that's cool. But I'm just not gonna run away from you because I'm out on the streets that you're basically walking around. Eventually I'll have to meet up with you.

Rather than avoid the confrontation, Jordan felt compelled to defend his friend and his own reputation by fighting someone who threatened them, a gangster who inhabited their neighborhood. He expressed a reluctance to brawl overall but justified it as long as it did not dampen his profits: "Although I have my tussles, I really wasn't big on fighting, especially if it had something to do with money." These examples illuminate the guidelines that govern sex workers' decisions about attacking others: It is only appropriate with men outside the sex industry, and in cases where one must protect oneself physically and defend one's reputation.

The inclusion of deviant cases further supports the claim that when one operates exclusively as a sex worker, he is likely to go to great lengths to avoid physical fights with men in this scene. Even when others became aggressive, male sex workers applied a variety of techniques to dissipate tensions. Yet during the coding process, it was apparent that two men routinely engaged in physical assaults and often instigated it; they did not fit the overarching pattern. Instead, they emulated a propensity for aggression that is often practiced by "street" men involved in illicit markets (Anderson 1999; Contreras 2013). The existence of these two outlier cases was puzzling, calling for additional theorizing in the form of deviant case analysis. What explains why Blue and Scott made contrary decisions regarding the use of violence compared to the rest of the men?

While most male sex workers considered participation in physical fights antithetical to their ability to attain capital, Blue and Scott felt differently largely due to their concurrent participation in other street crimes beyond prostitution. Although they did at times continue to exchange sex acts for compensation, they regularly used prostitution as a means to rob customers and sold drugs to earn money. They were prone to fight because they were less dependent on sex work for the acquisition of capital. In fact, at the time of our interview, Blue attested he rarely "had sex with men" anymore and just robbed people and sold marijuana. Such displays of aggression are not surprising as past studies highlight the utility of violence in the lives of robbers and drug dealers (Contreras 2013; Wright and Decker 1994). Physical dominance over others and willingness to dole out violence are tools to successfully execute such crimes. Given the diversity of means by which they accumulated money and social capital, Scott and Blue were far less concerned with any negative repercussions in the sex trade arena that resulted from assaults on others. Instead, violence was advantageous for them and necessary to carry out other illicit activities. Akin to "violent elite" (Collins 2008), they were particularly adept at wielding violence to achieve their end goals.

Scott admitted he was a drug dealer and sex worker for years: "I first started making deliveries for a dealer, to make some money. . . that escalated to filling out the packages, you know and selling. After some time, I also got into prostitution

and eased back a little on the dealing because it is so dangerous.” Blue likewise sold drugs to earn money, which enabled him to limit his involvement in sex work: “I started selling weed a few years back. I had not a good income but a steady income. I’ve got this source of income comin’ right now, so I didn’t need to depend on that [prostitution] so much.”

In addition to profits from drug sales, Blue and Scott often robbed customers and other sex workers. In cases of theft, maintaining physical domination was imperative, and any resistance from the victim resulted in a fight. For these two, robbery was a preferred means to acquire capital *vis-à-vis* sex work. Blue performed as a sex worker in order to arrange dates and steal from them: “My thing is now I have a whole new strategy. I’m basically trickin’ people out of their money. I try to get into they house, when they loaded and rob them when they pass out or fall asleep.” Even in situations where he was unable to inveigle an invitation to their home, he still relied on physical force to abscond with money. Blue explained that brute force is central to theft: “I perpetuate the violence by not doing what I say I’m gonna do. My thing is once I get the money, everything’s out the window. I’m finished with you [without rendering services]. I try to leave and the next thing ya know, we fightin’. I beat the hell out the dude. . . and run.” Scott also admitted he often robbed customers: “Pay me and as a matter of a fact, give me all of your money. Now I’m gonna rob you.” When male sex workers used physical aggression to commit theft, they adhered to the code of street by illustrating their power over other men (Wright and Decker 1994). This behavior aligned with practices inherent to hegemonic street masculinity, a form upheld by many men involved in street crimes (Mullins 2006).

In their assessment, violence not only resulted in the acquisition of money but also elevated their social standing in the form of masculine capital. They subscribed to the belief that one’s masculinity is undermined when insulted by another man or when financial interests are jeopardized by him. Similarly, Horowitz (1983:80) argues that honor is the glue that connects aggression, self-esteem, and manhood. Scott framed customer cheating as an affront to his male honor, which he interpreted as a blatant sign of disrespect. His swift response procured profits *and* allowed him to resuscitate his masculine status:

I dispense the violence primarily because I have been with clients who tell me we have a verbal agreement, and then when it’s over, they want to alter it. We’re in your car, you’re telling me you want to suck me off for \$40. When it’s over, you look in your wallet, and you say, ‘Damn, I only have \$10.’ Well, I’m ready to beat your ass now because you lied to me. You’re already using me, and now you want to kick me in the nuts, and it’s not gonna happen, so I administer violence.

Scott and Blue also attacked fellow sex workers when such behavior behooved them. Rather than befriend other workers, they used physical intimidation to gain access to territories occupied by others or to lure prospective customers away. Blue unequivocally depended on physical dominance to generate income: “I would purposely start somethin’ to steal clients or wait till you get around the corner—either way, I take your money from you. That’s how it is.” Despite his own incendiary actions, when others followed suit, he labeled them disrespectful. He threatened and assaulted them to protect his interests and save face:

A lot of times, if they come up and start talkin' to clients, I'll just keep talkin' to the trick to keep his attention off them. But if they come up to take him, I tell them in so many words to get the fuck on about your business. I make it clear that I'm serious. I'm gonna check you. Because if you try and take this person away from me, you're tryin' to take food outta my mouth. . . very disrespectful to me. I make them know that I'm not playin'. And they will leave. If not, next thing ya know, we're fightin'.

Scott acknowledged the geographical territories claimed by workers, but he disregarded boundaries and went wherever money could be made, knowing such transgressions were likely to generate conflict (Katz 1988). In a blatant dismissal of peaceable negotiations, he shed light on his thinking:

I didn't ever feel or I never looked at boundaries I can't cross. I'm international, I can go where I want to go and I tell people that. That's the way I've always been. If I see some prostitutes, the only thing I thought was they're making money over here, and I'm going to get me some. So I go over there anyway, no matter what happens.

A violent presentation of self during engagement in multiple street crimes is an intentional decision to enhance one's capital, but it is also tied to a particular type of masculinity. Blue and Scott performed masculinity informed by the code of the streets, one popular among men immersed within illicit street markets. Through their violent behavior, they risk experiencing negative backlash from clients and fellow sex workers—such as distrust, reduced solicitation, and tarnished reputations. But their participation in an array of street crimes enabled them to continue to increase their social and economic status via alternative means, which ultimately informed their willingness to partake in combative clashes. In contrast, the majority of sex workers were keenly aware of their reputation and others' perceptions of them within the sex trade; this was their exclusive source of income, and their livelihood depended on it. Their decision to practice a pacifist masculinity was part of a larger assessment about which behaviors benefited them most given the legal, economic, and social conditions that surround street-based sex work.

CONCLUSION

This article advances understanding of the relationship between violence and masculinities by focusing on two underresearched aspects. First, scholars possess limited insight about male offenders' decision making regarding assault and the external factors that inform this calculation. Second, much of the work on this topic tends to treat masculinity in these contexts as monolithic—characterized by male propensity for violence and dominance over others—with scant attention paid to the existence of alternative forms.

Men involved in street prostitution offer a unique opportunity to further examine men's enactment of violence in marginalized social settings. Moreover, there is much to gain from studies of male sex work because they help illuminate the construction and social organization of gender and sexuality (Minichiello and Scott 2014). While research on male offenders in these settings underscores their reliance on physical aggression to acquire various forms of capital, I find a different pattern among street-based sex workers. My analysis reveals their decisions to eschew combative encounters with men within the scene are heavily influenced by the legal,

economic, and social factors associated with the sex trade. Overall, most interact peaceably because they perceive that aggression is deleterious for business and increases the likelihood of criminalization and stigmatization.

In his study, Kong (2009:738) concludes that male sex workers “seem neither to search for a new gender identity nor challenge the accepted definitions of masculinity but rather conform to and support hegemonic masculinity. . . .” I find male sex workers display adherence to nonviolence, which coincides with their construction and practice of an alternative version of manhood—a pacifist masculinity. Pacifist masculinity is a hybrid form, based upon the incorporation of traits and actions associated with subordinate masculinity and even femininity. Male sex workers’ behaviors strongly deviate from the directives of street masculinity: talk to soothe interpersonal tensions, refusal to fight even when insulted, robbed, or harassed by another, fleeing from attacks rather than stand one’s ground, and pacifying men and their egos to procure benefits. If we evaluate such practices disentangled from the purview of the streets, however, it is apparent these individuals are especially savvy businessmen. The creation of a nuanced masculinity is indeed quite bold and innovative; sex workers implement it to maximize their capital but simultaneously run the risk of emasculation. Interestingly, by striving to be successful sex workers, their actions more closely align with prescriptions of hegemonic masculinity within conventional society—that of breadwinner and entrepreneur (Thébaud 2010).

I present data that support the argument that it is the occupation of sex work that impacts men’s willingness to inflict violence unto other men involved in the scene. The two outliers, Blue and Scott, strengthen this conclusion as they engaged in multiple types of street crime simultaneously and therefore were less wedded to their success in prostitution. They possessed numerous illicit avenues through which to attain capital, which ultimately affected decisions regarding their own bellicose actions. There is also some evidence that masculinity is in fact a flexible and adaptable performance. Certain male sex workers modified their aggressive actions to suit the circumstances and context so they could attain, or at least maintain, capital. Jordan nicely illustrates this phenomenon. Throughout exchanges with men in the sex trade Jordan refrained from violence, but when a neighborhood gangster confronted him, he resorted to physical blows in order to defend his reputation and safety. When sex workers, like Jordan, participated in fights, they only did so in situations that were unlikely to bring about negative repercussions for their work. Even these types of attacks, however, were uncommon acts of self-defense.

Predominant gender norms shape social actors’ behaviors within institutions, organizations, and neighborhood settings evident in gender regimes; yet interpersonal performances on the ground in the form of gender relations may not neatly align with such directives. Messerschmidt (1993:62) articulates this relationship in his structured action theory that is applicable to gender performances: “Social structures do not exist autonomously from humans; rather they arise and endure through social practice. . . [they are]. . . reproduced and even changed through social practice.” It follows that patterns of male–male violence can therefore be disrupted when groups of individuals establish a different set of conduct. When practiced, pacifist masculinity is a deviation that holds potential to undermine, if not

transform, the hegemonic street form. The corresponding practice of nonviolence also suggests that intragender relations can indeed be a catalyst to disrupt entrenched gender regimes within a given context. Ultimately, men engaged in prostitution, as a subordinate group, display agency through their ability to create and practice a hybrid version of masculinity that works for them (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

This study is limited by a small sample size of male street-based sex workers in one American city, and therefore nonviolence cannot be presented as a generalized pattern. Thus, it is unclear whether this population overwhelmingly subscribes to a pacifist masculinity. Although one can imagine that the conditions and risks associated with this type of labor are similar across U.S. cities, comparative empirical investigation of workers' decision-making processes regarding violent altercations and the factors that influence such practices is sorely needed. While these findings suggest that gender relations can challenge predominant codes of conduct sustained in gender regimes (via the creation of alternative masculinities), additional research should further examine how micro-level actions transform regimes and the mechanisms through which this transpires.

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