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Socks on or off? Emerging themes from a Sex-Work forum

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Background to Punternet

Punternet.com is an online forum/message board developed in 1999 that allows sex workers and potential customers (punters) to interact and communicate.

The long-running site has several message boards that cover a range of topics such as special interest matters surrounding health and safety, legalities and even danger warnings for workers and customers, as well as general discussion of 'punting'.

Research Rationale

Due to the heavy use of the forum and the frequent exchanges between both the workers and the punters it is a rich source of information.

Not only can the interactions between individuals be observed but themes and key issues can be identified and explored.

The research presented here attempted to identify emerging themes and issues as part of a preliminary investigation to aid and direct further research.

Approach

As the intention of the initial research was to identify broad categories and issues for further investigation and comparison a proto-mixed methods approach was adopted.

Our preliminary investigation began by sampling a week of active forum threads from the general discussion board of Punternet.

Activity was determined by the time of the last post (not thread/topic creation or administrative actions such as moving a thread to the general discussion board).

Common themes were observed and categorised independently by the researchers before being recorded for the preliminary descriptive analysis.

Descriptive Results

60 threads were recorded, with a total of 2362 individual posts. On average threads received 39.94 (SD = 48.51) posts, with only one thread receiving no reply.

Only one thread required moderator intervention.

In the 60 threads 73% contained a contribution from at least one self-identified sex worker.

Of the total threads 53% in some way concerned questions of 'punt' preference (both customer and worker's), 22% the etiquette of punting and 35% specific technical advice. 33% also considered emotional, philosophical or moral issues.

Theme	Working Definition
Punt Preference	Expressing a preference for a detail of specific punt experience or expressing an interesting in the preferences of others.
Etiquette	Expressing a belief in, or query about, the appropriate etiquette and procedure when engaging in a 'punt'.
Technical Advice	Requesting, providing or discussing advice relating to the technical aspects of a 'punt' experience such as sexual health, payment, travel etc.
Emotional, Philosophical and/or Moral Issues	Discussing issues such as emotional involvement, moral judgments on punts and punt behavior etc.

Punt Preference

"I have come the conclusion that one cannot please all of the people all of the time so if I am unshaved as I am at present and shaved is required I will gladly hand you a razor and leave it to you "

"I dont really have a definate type although I tend to go for... "

"I accept that we as service providers sometimes have to cater for requests we may not personally find a turn, perhaps even a little strange but having been told of this following episode even I am appalled and disgusted."

"I have never been with any escorts other than English ones, for those who have seen both are the UK girls the best or would anyone recommend seeing a European girl they do look real sexy mind..."

Technical Advice

"My advice would be like when "buying" anything...Different ladies offer very different experiences - in order to get the most from your punting you have to know what you want/need/like first, then find it."

"While many will say find a hotel with no form of security, that's easier said than done - especially one that also allows visitors to bypass noseey reception staff."

"I'm brand new to the world of punting and women! I'm a 24 yr old virgin and unfortunately not had much success with women and hoping seeing an escort or two will help me. I've looked around the net and done my research and seen a couple of girls I like the sound/look of but does anyone want to recommend a girl for me. I'm in London."

Etiquette

"At what point if any does looking become staring, become gawping, become ogling, become leering, become uncomfortable for you"

"I said no, I didn't want to do this, as I felt this crossed a boundary for me that I did not want to cross. Has any WG asked you to perform an activity you were uncomfortable with, and did you say "no"? "

"I like my clients to be intelligent and courteous, even when they come in twos [...] The problem I sense is that men assume a lady in bed with two or more men has to be a slut and needs to be spoken to as if she's a slut and that that is language she will respond to."

Emotional, Philosophical and/or Moral Issues

"To me if its a sexual service that the guys paid for its a punt so if he is feeling you up or its a massage with a HE its a punt. Some feel guilty so need to assuage their feelings of guilt by pretending its not a punt from what i have read. "

"...I also won't do clubs or swinging with other guys or host parties without my OH. Also I won't do 'new' sexual things with anyone else."

"I see paid-for sexual activity outside of the relationship as a secret hobby that harms neither myself, nor my partner, nor our relationship"

"What does everyone else think, is prostitution a profession or would another word such as vocation be more technically correct?...do you think it could ever tick all of the boxes of a profession?"

Thread Content

