

Making sense of sex tourism through the accounts of sex tourists

*A Foucauldian discourse analysis of sex tourists' online
communication*

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Abstract

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This thesis explores the perspective of the male *sex tourist* by studying posts on a ‘sex travel guide’ web page. The study is placed within qualitative social psychology, and makes use of *Foucauldian discourse analysis* in a naturalistic setting. Thus, it is framed within social constructionist and poststructuralist epistemological frameworks. The aims of the study are to analyze the *discursive resources* the sex tourists draw upon in their posts, to explore how they construct the phenomenon of sex tourism, and to identify the subject positions they take on through these constructions and the opportunities of experience that these entail. The men posting messages on the ‘sex travel guide’ present the act of buying sex from women as *ethically acceptable*. The data indicates that they do so through drawing upon ideas from market economy, colonialism, individualism and heteronormativity. Through the subject positions opened by these frameworks of understanding, the sex tourists express experiences of power, of being desired, of being normal, and of being emotionally distanced to the prostitute. I argue that these experiences allow regarding oneself in a favorable light, while carrying out the stigmatized behavior that buying sex could be said to represent. Finally, I suggest that the market economic discourse is of special relevance to study in further research, as I argue that this discursive resource provides ethical justification of buying sex, while at the same time fostering an objectified representation of the prostitute that might lead to a process of dehumanization.

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Introduction

Prostitution has been in the center of public debate throughout all times. Buying and selling sex evokes strong emotions; it fascinates, provokes, thrills and disgusts us. Prostitution is in most countries a legislated practice, and thus must be said to represent an *ethically* problematic phenomenon. Especially ethically problematic perhaps, when the asymmetry of the client and the prostitute's relationship is increased, as is often the case in *sex tourism*. Research indicates that *sex tourists* in general are men in resourceful positions that buy sex from poor, colored women in underdeveloped countries (Richter, 1998). Sex tourism could be understood as prostitution in a specific context, and it displays an encounter between people from different socio- economical positions, ethnicities and cultural backgrounds. Sex tourism might thus be said to represent a context- dependent phenomenon (Opperman, 1999), as it varies from being inextricably intertwined in a country's economy to being relatively unorganized (Ryan & Hall, 2001). Within Western social sciences, sex tourism is a relatively new topic. The interest for the phenomenon began to grow in the 1970s with increased attention to sexually transmitted diseases, especially the risk of contracting HIV on trips to poor, underdeveloped countries (Ryan & Hall, 2001). Cohen (1982) claims that it represents a paradox that sex tourism has been studied to such a little degree, when it has been such a well-known and often condemned phenomenon. A factor that may have contributed to this is some countries political unwillingness to acknowledge the existence of sex tourism, something that has lead to difficulty in estimating the size of the commercial sex industry (Ryan & Hall, 2001). Also, it may be a result of the fact that sex tourism often is taking place far away from the streets of industrialized countries, which makes it a distant phenomenon that is not 'our' responsibility.

For many people living in the Western world it would be unimaginable to travel to poor, underdeveloped countries to buy sex, because this would be ethically problematic on many levels. But for some people, traveling to countries such as Cambodia with the aim of buying sex represents a behavior that makes sense. This has intrigued me to ask the question of how sex tourism is thought about when it makes sense to buy sex from people in vulnerable situations. For example, what understandings of sex tourism are present when the act of buying sex from a young, Cambodian girl becomes an alternative? This thesis explores the *frameworks of understanding* that underpin the male sex tourist's decision to buy sex from a *female prostitute* in a vulnerable situation. These frameworks of understanding are explored within the context of a *web page* defined as a 'sex travel guide'. The web page has about 3000

registered members, and consists of what is likely to be North- American clients' evaluations of encounters with prostitutes at destinations all over the world.

The study is placed within qualitative social psychology, and makes use of *Foucauldian discourse analysis* in a naturalistic setting. Thus, the study is framed within *social constructive* and *poststructuralist* epistemological frameworks. Foucauldian discourse analysis holds that we draw upon available *discursive resources*, on the frameworks of understanding that are present within a social context, in the production of knowledge on a phenomenon (Willig, 2001). Through the study of *language* as a carrier of meaning we can gain access to the discursive resources available, and we are able to explore "...ways of seeing the world and certain ways of being in the world" (Willig 2001, p. 175). Thus, by investigating the frameworks of understanding on sex tourism present in the sex tourists accounts, we can explore how the sex tourists are positioned as subjects within the systems of meaning, how the subject becomes "the bearer of the kind of knowledge which discourse produces" (Hall, 2001 p. 79).

I suggest that exploring the discursive resources that sex tourists draw upon in their constructions of sex tourism is of relevance, as this perspective has received limited attention within the social scientific study of sex tourism. Also, alongside a growth in the travel and tourism industry (Wonders & Michalowski, 2001) a pronounced increase in sex tourism has been registered (Opperman, 1998). Herman (1995) argues that sex tourism is: "one of the booming markets in the New World Order – a multi- billion dollar industry with finders, brokers, syndicate operations and pimp 'managers' at the scene of action" (p. 5). Thus, there is a need for knowledge on sex tourism, and through studying the accounts of sex tourists we might be provided with some insight into the frameworks of understanding that are present when buying sex from a person in a vulnerable situation makes sense. This leads to the research questions that will be studied in this thesis: *What are the discursive resources sex tourists draw upon in their constructions of sex tourism? And through these constructions of sex tourism, how is the subject positioned, and what opportunities of experience do these subject positions entail?*

I will now account for the concepts that are explored in this study, before I move on to a presentation of existing research on sex tourism to clarify my choice of approach and method used in the study.

Definitions and theoretical background

Sex tourism displays an encounter between two phenomena, tourism and sex. These concepts are closely tied on several societal levels. The link between sex and tourism has been demonstrated in the prevalent use of sexual imagery in the advertisement for tourist destinations (Heatwole, 1989), and we can find more subtle versions of the link in concepts such as the ‘holiday- fling’ or ‘Rave’. Sex tourism could encompass a wide spectrum of sexual relations in the context of travel, ranging from a pure commercial transaction such as buying sexual intercourse from a Thai girl in a motel in Pattaya, to traveling to the San Francisco’s Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Pride Parade to observe different sexual expressions. Thus we see that there is a need to delimit sex tourism in order to study the psychological processes involved.

Sex tourism could be defined as prostitution, but this view is challenged by some researchers such as for example by Opperman (1999), who argues that prostitution and sex tourism overlap, but still must be studied as separate phenomena. Sex tourism, he claims, involves more than the “monetary change” that characterizes prostitution, it also involves factors such as the “...purpose of travel, length of time, relationship, sexual encounter, and who falls in this category of travel” (p. 252). Thus, in the study of sex tourism we have to nuance the mechanisms involved so that we study the phenomenon as context dependent. I find Opperman’s argument fruitful to keep in mind when studying sex tourism, but at the same time I argue that there is a need to define the *relation* that takes place in commercial sex, to study sex tourism. Thus I consider it to be necessary to define the concepts of ‘prostitution’ and ‘client’ to clarify the concepts that are studied in this thesis.

Prostitution and the client

Defining prostitution is complex, for what is being sold? Is it sex? Power? A body? A service? The complexity of defining prostitution is illustrated in the choice of terms that are used to characterize the person that is selling sex. In most Scandinavian literature and research the term ‘prostitute’ is used, while in American and British literature the term ‘sex worker’ is often used synonymously. I find the term ‘sex worker’ to be problematic as it so clearly defines that sex is work, and I therefore choose to make use of the term ‘prostitute’ as this does not explicitly define what is sold. Further, I will make use of the terms ‘client’ and

‘sex tourist’ on the person buying sex. Even though these terms, and especially ‘client’ can be claimed to be defined within a market terminology on prostitution, I find that they are relatively neutral, and not as negatively loaded as for example ‘Johns’ or ‘punter’. I choose to follow Kippe’s (2004) definition of prostitution: “purchase and sale of sexual favors for money or other material goods” (p. 5). So, I define sex tourism as a *prostitution - based sexual relation* in the context of travel. The sex tourist then becomes someone who buys sexual favors for money or other material goods in the context of travel. This leads to the question of how we are to define a sexual favor?

When defining sex tourism we have to take into account that the line between a “normal” sexual relation and a prostitution- based sexual relation can be thin and fluctuate. In other words, we have to separate “sex in tourism” from “sex tourism” (Clift & Carter, 2000 p. 9). This ambiguity can be illustrated in the following questions: Is it sex tourism when a Norwegian tourist receives a lap dance from a stripper in a bar in Pattaya? Also, does a live ‘peep show’ on the Internet constitute a prostitution- based sexual relation even though there is no physical contact? I follow the line of thought by Kippe (2004), who claim that instead of focusing on the sexual acts as defining prostitution, we should focus on the aim of the purchase, on the sexual pleasure that is the motivation for the purchase. Hence, when the aim of paying for a sexual favor is to experience sexual pleasure, as is the case in the scenarios presented above, the act could be defined as prostitution.

I have now discussed the definitions of the concepts that are explored in this study, and I will continue with reviewing existing research on sex tourism, explaining the choice of topic and method in the thesis, and arguing for why I consider it to be of relevance to study the perspective of the sex tourist.

What has been the focus of previous research on sex tourism?

In the last two decades there has been registered a considerable growth in sex tourism, something which has been linked to processes of globalization, specifically to increasing migration and tourism; “One significant global force shaping sex tourism is the worldwide movement of bodies across borders, whether for business, war or pleasure” (Wonders & Michalowski, 2001 p. 548). Wonders & Michalowski (2001) argue that we have to understand sex tourism in relation to globalized *capitalism*, as this economic system through its expansion entails new forms of labor and consumption, introducing market- structure into

previously ‘untouched’ arenas, creating new forms of *commodity*. This point illustrates the complexity of the phenomenon of sex tourism, as is also emphasized by Hall (1996) in the following statement:

Sex tourism is not simply about sex, but is a response to the complex interaction of gender, class, cultural, sexual and power relations in both the tourist’s and the sex worker’s society which sanctions the commodification of certain human relationships.
(p. 182)

Roughly one can separate previous research on the phenomenon into the following subtopics; the political and economical underpinnings of sex tourism (Bishop & Robinson, 1998), sex tourism and STDs (Clift & Paige, 1996), the gendered patterns of sex tourism (Richter, 1998), studies of the people involved in sex tourism (O’Connell Davidson, 1995), homosexual sex tourism (Clift & Forrest, 1999), children in the international sex industry (O’Connell Davidson & Sanchez Taylor, 2001), and finally sex tourism and globalization (Wonders & Michalowski, 2001). There are also studies that have taken on a multidisciplinary approach, such as Truong’s (1990) comprehensive analysis of how Thailand became a sex tourism destination. The variety of the subtopics demonstrates the complexity of sex tourism, and thus strengthens Opperman’s (1999) invitation to nuance the understanding and study of the phenomenon.

Gender in sex tourism

The term ‘sex tourist’ is surrounded by stereotypical characterizations, which paint images of old, lonely and ugly men looking for a young girl to enjoy himself with for an hour or two. But, what do we really know about the sex tourist? Although there is some disagreement about the definition of the sex tourist, research indicates that sex tourists in general are men in resourceful positions that buy sex from poor, colored women in underdeveloped countries (Richter, 1998). This gendered pattern is consistent with the general tendency in prostitution; the prostitute is in most cases a woman and the client is most often a man. However, in the case of sex tourism other tendencies have also been demonstrated. Studies of tourism in Gambia (Harrell- Bond, 1978) and in the Caribbean (Matthews, 1978) show a pattern where male prostitutes sell sex to female clients. Also, studies of children in the sex industry in poor countries such as Sri Lanka and the Philippines demonstrate other tendencies than the usual

'picture', with young boys constituting respectively 90 % and 60 % of child prostitutes (Rogers, 1989). Although the context dependent gendered positioning is an aspect to take into account, I have chosen to study a web page that demonstrates the most widespread gendered pattern within all commercial sex. The fact that this is such a widespread pattern is in itself interesting to me.

What do we know about the behavior of sex tourists?

It has been claimed that sex tourism displays context dependent phenomena (Opperman, 1999), and one might say that comparisons of sex tourism in for example South- Asia and Amsterdam supports this claim. The typical sex tourist in South- Asia spends several days with the prostitute, and he often pays her in material goods (Opperman, 1999), while in the case of Amsterdam, commercial sex is rated as the second most important theme in the image of the city as a tourist destination. Amsterdam is associated with "... a youth culture of sexual liberation and narcotic indulgence" (Dales, 1998 p. 55). The city is known for the 'window shopping' version of prostitution that is taking place in the Red Light District, something which creates a sensation- based selling point as a tourist destination. This specific form of prostitution attracts a more global variety of sex tourists than what Thailand does. Thus, these examples indicates that the behavior of sex tourists depend on the context in which they are buying sex and on their motivation for the purchase.

What motivates men to buy sex in the context of travel?

The question of motives for buying sex in the context of travel has received relatively little attention within the social scientific study of sex tourism. O'Connell Davidson's (1995) study of British sex tourists in Thailand, is one of the few studies that provide insights into the frameworks of understanding underpinning the act of buying sex. This study indicated that British men were drawn to buying sex in Thailand by various motivations. Among these motivations the most important were the price advantages, the possibility of feeling sovereign towards the prostitute and other men, the non- contractual nature of the sexual transaction and finally the possibility of constructing themselves according to certain masculine ideals (p. 45). Thus we see that to these men buying sex was connected to processes concerning self,

personal and social identity. This indicates that the motivations underpinning the act of buying sex in a travel context can be much more complex than buying a sexual favor with the aim of getting sexually satisfied. Ryan (2000) supports this point in his claim that sex tourism can be understood as a search for identity, in that sex is a “contributing factor to a sense of individuality” (p. 25). Further, he argues that this confirmation of ‘self’ through sex must be understood in relation to *individualism*, which he argues holds understandings of sex as inextricably intertwined in a person’s sense and *expression* of identity.

Also, in research on ‘regular’ prostitution men express a variety of motivations for buying sex. Kippe (2004) reported that the clients in her study were motivated by a desire for intimacy, by a biological need to have sex, or by prostitution being an arena for experimenting with different sexual acts. Prieur & Taksdal’s (1989) study demonstrated that among the seamen in their sample, buying sex constituted a form of ritual that expressed and confirmed male identity and sexuality, and that also manifested a form of male fellowship. In Smette’s study (2003) of clients’ online communication, some clients expressed a strong link between being a ‘real man’ and having a strong need for sex, as is exemplified by a client in this statement: “Why men never say no to sex? THAT has something to do with basic instincts and hormones. A man who does not take the chance to show his manhood is barely a man, just a male individual” (p. 91).

Thus, we see that the choice to buy sex could be understood in relation to psychological processes on an individual, group and societal level, involving understandings and expressions of sex, gender, identity and self. The motivations identified in these studies tell us something about the frameworks of understanding that underpin the decision to buy sex. In the present study, I wish to explore these frameworks of understanding further, not by focusing on specific motivations for buying sex, but rather on exploring the discursive resources sex tourists draw upon, when buying sex from a person in a vulnerable situation makes sense. I will now continue with arguing for why I consider a web page to be a relevant context for studying the normative world of the sex tourist.

Internet mediated research – The function of the web page

Why study a client web page? Internet is becoming an increasingly important context for communication between the different agents involved in the sex industry (O’Neill, 2001). It allows for prostitutes to advertise their services in a more organized way than standing on the

corner, it opens up for live sex shows online, and it enables people to share experiences on web pages and blogs, creating collective fellowships. Earle & Sharp (2007) argue that the Internet is a *gendered* 'social technology' as a result of the fact that the majority of those who are developing Internet technology, and who facilitate Internet practice such as hacking, stalking and surfing for pornography, are men. By terming Internet a social technology, they are building upon the argument made by Sproull & Faraj (1997) that the Internet has the function of socially organizing individuals' understandings and practices. Internet has enabled the possibility of organizing isolated individuals with what is considered deviant sexual behavior in society into supporting collectives. In other words, one does not have to be alone with ones deviance anymore.

Among the studies that have been carried out on clients' online communication, there has most often been a focus on the *function* of the web page. A study by Holt & Blevins (2007) demonstrated that the web page served an informative function for the clients, in that they used it to identify and solicit prostitutes, as well as to discuss external risks. Another perspective that has been explored is the function of the *fellowship* provided by the web page. A study of a British web page carried out by Earle & Sharp (2007) indicated that this forum served a *normalizing* function, in that the fellowship constituted a normative world with its own set of ethics that portrayed buying sex as natural and positive. The researchers argue that buying sex constitutes a threat to male sexuality and identity in that it poses the question of why these men have to pay for something that should come naturally. Participating in a discourse where buying sex is considered natural, Earle & Sharp claim, enables clients to sustain a positive understanding of their own sexuality and identity.

Further, a few studies have addressed the meaning making frameworks of understanding underpinning the act of buying sex in clients online discussions of 'regular' prostitution. These have demonstrated a tendency to talk about sex as a *service*, as a commodity provided in a market (Smette, 2003; Earle & Sharp, 2007; Jahnsen, 2008). Jahnsen argues that in her study of clients' online communication prostitution was constructed as a "pure commercial transaction, where gender, ethnicity, sexuality, body and money are different forms of capital that can be exchanged on a free market" (p. 2). Versions of this *market economic* terminology are also expressed in the present study, something that will be accounted for in the results.

Why study sex tourists' communication on a web page?

The social scientific study of sex tourism has mainly been focused on the structural systems that underpin its existence, and the amount of research on the frameworks of understanding underpinning the act of buying sex in a travel context, is limited. Also, even though the Internet is an important arena for communication for the people involved in the sex industry, there has been a limited amount of research carried out on the Internet as a context for communication about prostitution and sex tourism. Most research on the perspective of the client has been carried out through interviewing self-selected samples, which might have led to knowledge on a biased sample (Earle & Sharp, 2007). I suggest that it is relevant to study sex tourists' communication on a web page because this allows us to make use of a *naturalistic observation design*. This enables us to reach data that was not intentionally meant for research, and we can become the observers of, and not participants in, the communication. Earle & Sharp (2007, p.14) claim that: "The website offers an insight into the hidden world of men who pay for sex, allowing us to explore their normative world through their accounts". I support this claim when arguing that studying the 'sex travel guide' allows us to explore the discursive resources clients draw their constructions of sex tourism upon, perhaps also enabling us to get some insight into the normative worlds of clients that are unlikely to participate in research. As buying sex represents stigmatized behavior it is possible that certain groups of clients will not participate in research, a point that will be further elaborated in the methodology and discussion sections. I will now continue accounting for the theoretical background of this study by presenting the research design.

Epistemological frameworks for the study

The epistemological basis of a study directs the research design, the methodology and the interpretation of the results. Thus, there is a need to clarify how knowledge is understood within the epistemological frameworks, and also to account for how the researcher's influence on the research process is comprehended. This thesis is designed as a qualitative social psychological study and makes use of Foucauldian discourse analysis within a naturalistic setting. This methodology is rooted in post structuralism, which is concerned with the systems of meaning that form the knowledge that is produced (Blackburn, 1994). This implies that language is understood as representing certain frameworks of understanding that position us

as subjects that relate to objects in a certain way. Further, Foucauldian discourse analysis draw upon social constructionism, which emphasizes that what we take as knowledge is not a reflection of the world, but an expression of how we *understand* and *categorize* phenomena in the world (Burr, 1995). This perspective also holds that our understanding of the world is historically and culturally *contingent*; we live in a certain context that forms certain understandings. These understandings become the guideline for our social practice, the way we comprehend the world guides how we position ourselves in relation to different phenomena (Burr, 1995). Thus, the statements posted on the web page in the present study are understood as representing the clients' social constructions of sex tourism in a specific time and cultural context.

Also, I approach the topic with an *interpretive* (Toma, 2000) understanding of my role as researcher. This understanding holds that my interests and attitudes toward the research topic affect data collection and data analysis by emphasizing certain aspects and omitting others. Thus, I believe that my frameworks of understanding influence the research process and outcome of the study. Therefore clarifying how I position myself in relation to sex tourism would be essential to work with *subjectivity* in the data analysis (Gough & Madill, 2007). The method that will be used in this process is *reflexivity*, an awareness of ones approach towards the topic and understanding of the phenomena which enables one to work critically with a subjective, interpretive analytic method (Gough & Madill, 2007). Giorgi (1975) claims that the key criteria in controlling the interpretation process in qualitative analysis is to make the context and intention of the research known, so that “a reader that takes on the same perspective as the researcher, can see what the researcher saw, irrespective of whether he agrees with this or not” (p. 96). Based on this argument, I will now give a short account of how I position myself in relation to sex tourism, and through this explain the way I choose to approach the topic of my study.

My approach and motive for studying sex tourism

Sex tourism engages and provokes. Among researchers there is a great variety of perspectives present, ranging from a view that sex tourism is a distinctive form of economic exploitation (O'Connell Davidson, 1995), to an understanding of prostitution as work based on free will (Brewis & Linstead, 2002). As aforementioned, this study is fostered by the question of how it can make sense to travel to poor, underdeveloped countries to buy sex. Obviously, this

implies that to me this act would not be an alternative. Although I acknowledge that prostitution can entail positive and constructive elements for some, I find that paying people in a vulnerable situation for sex represents ethically problematic behavior, and I take on a *humanistic* approach in arguing that this act violates basic human dignity. This evaluation is based upon the fact that some prostitutes involved in the sex industry in poor, underdeveloped countries are especially vulnerable in that they are dependent on prostitution to provide them and their families with a minimum of life's necessities (Wonders & Michalowski, 2001). The prostitute and the client are not positioned in a symmetrically dependent relationship; In contrast to the prostitute, the client can move his business elsewhere if not satisfied (O'Connell Davidson, 1995). Thus, some of these prostitutes are in a situation where they cannot afford to have personal boundaries, and thus are in risk of physical and psychological damage.

Further, I consider the fact that we know so little about the demand side of prostitution to be a valid argument for studying the perspective of the sex tourist. The social scientific study of prostitution has mostly been focused on the prostitute, and Prasad (1999) argues that this lack of focus on the demand side of the transaction in prostitution, contributes to a *naturalization* of paying for sex. Sanders (2008) points to it being an interesting fact in itself that the prostitute has been studied to a much greater degree than the client. This, she claims, says something about how sexuality and gender have been understood within the social sciences. The absence of research on the client's role in prostitution is thus connected to certain understandings of gender and sexuality. While the prostitute throughout time has been studied as a representative of deviant sexuality (Wonders & Michalowski, 2001) the client has been more or less left alone, as is also the case in sex tourism. It seems that we have more difficulty understanding how a person can sell sex than why a person can pay for sex. As the sex industry is dependent on a demand to sustain its existence and growth, and as the client side of prostitution certainly outnumbers that of the seller side, I argue that studying the frameworks of understanding that underpin the decision to buy sex is of relevance.

Theoretical framework and ethical concerns following the methodology

I will now account for the theoretical background founding the methodology used in the study, and I will start by discussing the analytical concepts in Foucauldian discourse analysis, to clarify why I consider this method to be a relevant tool for exploring the normative world

of the sex tourist. Further, I will address some ethical concerns that follow Internet mediated research, before accounting for the steps in the research process.

Foucauldian discourse analysis

Foucauldian discourse analysis has its roots in the work of Michel Foucault (1926-1984), and draws, as previously discussed, upon social constructionist and poststructuralist epistemology. According to Hall (1997), Foucault claims that: “nothing has any meaning outside of discourse” (p. 73) and thus that a phenomenon like *sexuality* gains its meaning through the *discursive* system it is a part of (Foucault, 1978). Within Foucauldian discourse analysis the term ‘discourse’ refers to: “a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment... Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language...” (Hall, 1992 p. 291). Thus, this understanding of discourse differs from that within discursive psychology, where the term is more concentrated on how the speaker actively makes use of discourses to validate claims (Willig, 2008). A central focus in Foucauldian discourse analysis is on identifying the “discursive economy”, the availability of certain *discursive resources*, within a social context (Willig, 2008 p. 171). This term differs to some degree from the concept of ‘ideology’, as Foucault criticized this term for entailing an implication that there exists a form of rational and universal truth (Hall, 1997). Further, the available economy of discursive resources is created, maintained and limited in relation to the *power* structures available in a social context. Thus, knowledge and power are inextricably intervened in setting the limits for possible ways of seeing the world (Hall, 1992).

The 6 steps of Foucauldian discourse analysis

Foucauldian discourse analysis explores: “What characterizes the discursive worlds participants inhabit and what are their implications for possible ways of being?” (Willig, 2008 p. 182). In the present thesis the aims are to explore the discursive resources the sex tourists on the ‘sex travel guide’ draw upon in their accounts on sex tourism, and through this to study how the sex tourists are positioned as subjects within the available frameworks of understanding. Consequently, this might provide us with *some insights* into ways of thinking

about sex tourism, when buying sex from people in a vulnerable situation makes sense. I chose to follow Willig's (2008) model of Foucauldian discourse analysis, which involves 6 steps that contain the following analytical perspectives: First there is the location of important discursive objects that speak out of the text. These discourses are constructions of the object of interest, in this study on constructions of the act of buying sex. The next step is to identify how the same discursive objects are constructed in different ways, how different terminology can construct, support and maintain the same discursive object. Step 3 involves a placing of the discursive objects within the discursive economy, thus to identify the frameworks of understanding that the discourses rest upon. Step 4 in the analysis is to identify the position the client places himself in when he builds an argument upon certain discursive resources, to investigate the *subject positions*, "figures who personify the particular forms of knowledge which the discourse produces" (Hall 1997, p. 80). Through the exploration of the subject positions one is able to get some insight into the possibilities that are opened for the client when it comes to buying sex, and also the possibilities that are closed down (step 5). The last point in the analysis is to make use of the subject positions identified, to explore what can be experienced through these, concerning the act of buying sex in a travel context. In other words, I will try to make sense of sex tourism through the social constructions available on the web page.

Foucauldian discourse analysis in a naturalistic setting – observational research

The study takes the form of an observational study within a naturalistic setting. I have chosen not to inform the participants on the web page that they are being studied, and I have not posted questions on the web page. The decisions not to obtain informed consent or to make use of participant observation, are based on my assumption that informing the participants about the study would pose a risk that posts would be deleted or that the web page changed its name or got shut down, a point that I will discuss further later in the thesis.

The web page

As previously discussed I decided to study a web page because this provides a context where one is allowed to study sex tourists with a naturalistic observation design. The Internet is a

jungle of sex and porn, and finding a web page for the study appeared to be more difficult than expected. I began the search by trying to find a Norwegian or Scandinavian web page, but these proved to be well hidden and I therefore extended the search to include international web pages. I started this extended search by looking at the links on one established and publicly accessible British client web page. Although the list of links looked promising it soon became evident that most of these web pages were advertisements for prostitutes. Also, when I found web pages concerned with sex tourism, these had copyright statements that threatened with lawsuits for those who had other motives for reading the material than a strong desire for commercial sex. I also tried to become a member of two publicly disseminated web pages by paying for a membership, but when I registered my contact information both the web pages displayed information on an error in the registration. This may have been a result of me being female, and thus being unwanted on these pages. I did not continue trying to become a member of these web pages, as I suspected them of having strict copyright statements.

One day my luck turned when I, by using Google to search the word 'sex tourism', found a publicly accessible web page that did not mention copyright. This was an approach I had tried before, but which failed at the time. I have decided to keep the name of the web page hidden, a decision I will discuss later on in this section. The web page is defined as a "highly informative but concise travel guide that covers the worlds' most alluring sex tourism destinations". It consists of so called 'travel tales', picture galleries, general tourist information about travel destinations and links to other similar web pages. The travel tales, who constitute the data in this thesis, are about experiences that the members of the page have had with prostitutes in different destinations all over the world, although most are centered in Asia, with an overweight on Thailand. The travel tales are placed under different countries, so that you can click onto the destination of interest and find reviews of prostitutes in this specific place. In other words this site is like a prostitution- version of 'lonely planet'. The page has around 3000 registered members, and one can only speculate about how many people that are using this page as a source of information.

The web page is addressed to men buying sex from women, and thus represents heterosexual sex tourism. All the posts are concerned with experiences with female prostitutes, but the web page also manifests a heterosexual framing through the image of a naked woman in the sunset that is displayed on the entering page. Further, it seems to be mostly North- American men that are using the web page as the posts are written in English and the language that is used has some American slang. This however, is impossible to know

for sure as the members do not have to submit any information when posting statements on the web page.

The ethical boundary of the web page

There were certain ethical evaluations I had to address before starting the analysis of the web page, and I will now account for these. When entering the web page one has to agree with the following criteria: you have to be at least 18 years old and you have to consent to viewing the content that the page claims to consist of. Thus, this is where the web page has set its legal and ethical boundaries. In this way, the web page comes off as having taken a responsible and well- reflected standpoint on sex tourism. The web page has warned you and if you feel offended by the material it is your problem, you should not have entered the web page in the first place. The ethical boundary that has been set builds an image of the web page as responsible, while in reality placing the responsibility on you. It also gives an impression that those who use the page are completely okay with the content, and that it is only you that might have a problem with it.

So, the question then becomes what it means to be comfortable with commercial sex? This is a difficult question to answer, but I claim that being comfortable is a vague term that could imply different meanings. If one could say that being comfortable means having some form of *acceptance* for the fact that people buy and sell sex, then I would say that I am comfortable with it. Also, there is the evaluation of whether the cause justifies the means. As Internet becomes more and more important as a window into ‘hidden worlds’, I believe that it is important to explore the perspectives that are present there, thus that the insights one might gain justifies the ‘lurking’.

The ethics of Internet mediated research - Informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality

Internet mediated research fosters specific ethical concerns that need to be addressed. Especially there is the debate on the ownership of text published in a public sphere that the Internet represents. Kitchin (1998) illustrates this dilemma with the following question: “who owns a message on a bulletin board? The system operator? The poster?” (p. 107). In the present study I decided not to inform the users of the web page that their text was being

studied. Thus, I did not obtain an informed consent for observing the web page and reprinting the data. So is it ethically acceptable to use these posts as data when the authors have not given their consent? Some researchers argue that the question of ownership can be evaluated by distinguishing between digital data sampled from open access fora and from closed chat rooms (Waskul and Douglas, 1996). The web page in this study does not contain any mentioning of copyright, and it is not necessary to be a member to view the content of the site. Also, one can get access to it by ‘googling’ ‘sex tourism’, something that qualifies it as a publicly accessible kind of web page. I argue that this open admission design of the site qualifies it to be studied without getting an informed consent from the authors of the posts. The decision not to obtain an informed consent is also based upon the nature of the topic of the web page. As aforementioned, I argue that informing the participants would pose a risk of affecting the outcome of the study. This is a concern in all research, but I find the risk to be high in the case of this study, as buying sex represents a stigmatized behavior. Thus, informing the participants could possibly result in people deleting or changing their statements, or in a worst-case scenario the web page changing name or shutting down.

Punch (1994) argues that the decision to use covert research methods should be based upon an evaluation of the risk of consequences for the participants, the profession and for the researcher. Buying sex represents stigmatized behavior and thus to be identified as a client is likely to be followed by some sort of condemnation. When the context being studied is the Internet, one might need to be extra careful, as it is easy to reach the participants by posing statements directly on the web page. I decided to keep the name of the web page secret to prevent eventual repercussions towards the page, something that has happened in previous online research (Walther, 1999). Further, I chose not to anonymize the online pseudonyms of the users, as they are quite general usernames and apparently contain no information that might identify the people posting statements on the web page. The latter however is impossible to know for sure, but as argued by Earle & Sharp (2007) in their study of a client web page: these people have made the decision to publish statements on a publicly accessible web page under certain pseudonyms. Thus, they must be aware that their statements can be viewed by many, and they are likely to have chosen online pseudonyms that does not reveal too much about their identity. Further, I suggest that the process of contacting these people to gain an informed consent might in itself lead to a reduction in the level of anonymity they currently enjoy.

So, could this study have consequences for the users of the web page, the profession of psychology or for me? Based on the facts that the web page is publicly accessible and that the

users of the post are anonymized under online pseudonyms I believe that the risk of harm for those who post is low. Also, as aforementioned, those publishing statements on this web page might be people that are unlikely to participate in research, so studying the 'sex travel guide' may be a way to gain insights into the frameworks of understanding underpinning the act of buying sex for this specific group of sex tourists. Finally, I evaluate the possibility of this study having negative consequences for me as minimal.

After now having accounted for the theoretical framework for, and ethical concerns following, the study, I will move on to a presentation of the methodology that has been carried out.

Methodology

Data sampling

The data from the web page was sampled in a period reaching from December 2008 to January 2009, by reading through all the posts that exist on the web page. The web page contains 136 posts, and among these 34 posts (36 A4 pages) proved to be qualified for the study. In this data material some of the sex tourists have written more than one post, and all in all there are 20 persons posting their experiences. There is of course a possibility that some have posted statements under more than one nickname, but I find this unlikely, as the writers use different styles of expression. The qualification of the posts was based on the following criteria: 1. It had to contain a description of a sexual act with a prostitute. 2. The sexual act had to be experienced first hand by the person writing the text. The posts that did not qualify for the study contained general travel information or they were difficult to understand. One might ask then; how do we know whether the ‘field reports’ represents real experiences? The anonymity provided by the Internet makes it impossible to know whether a statement in fact represents the truth. We cannot even know whether an alleged client has ever bought sex. This however is a question that follows studies of all written data. How do we know whether written text represent the truth? What is relevant to ask then is what one might get out of constructing stories about buying sex?

Motivations for online storytelling

Why post your experiences and thoughts about buying sex online? Buying sex is often talked about as immoral in the public sphere, although the degree of public disgrace varies in different contexts. Earle & Sharp (2007) claim that buying sex constitutes a threat to male identity and sexuality, because it implies that one is not able to establish a sexual relation the “natural way”. They argue on the basis of their aforementioned study, that web pages may have a normalizing function for clients, by creating their own normative worlds where buying sex is considered a normal and positive thing to do. Thus, they suggest that a motivation for online storytelling about this topic could be to normalize ones behavior, and by that to neutralize the threat buying sex represents. I follow this line of thought when suggesting that it is unlikely that someone is constructing stories about buying sex, considering this being a

stigmatized behavior, and that a possible motive for online storytelling on the ‘sex travel guide’ is to be a part of a companionship where sex tourism is talked about as normal. This suggestion will be elaborated in the discussion section.

When evaluating the question of authenticity, one also has to consider the aim and epistemological perspectives that constitute the basis of a study. The focus in this study is on exploring the language used when talking (more specifically, writing about) sex tourism. The study is as aforementioned built upon poststructuralist and social constructionist principles that hold that meanings are changeable, context dependent and thus not representative of an underlying truth. In other words, the aim of the study is not to search for an objective ‘truth’, but to explore how meanings and positions are constructed as knowledge through language, and how these meanings and positions draw upon certain frameworks of understanding. I will now continue with accounting for the data analysis process.

Data analysis

In qualitative analysis it is important to account for every step in the research process to ensure that the analysis is systematic, thorough and valid. It is necessary to make sure that the research process is *transparent* (Spencer, Ritchie & O’Connor, 2006) so that the reader can critically evaluate the interpretation that has been carried out. To strive for this transparency, I will now account for how I have carried out the analysis on an extract from a post on the web page. I will exemplify the analysis with the travel tale by ‘Mr. Big Shot’ (Italy):

Sex for sell [*sic*] in Italy isn't very organized, but it's there if you know how to spot it. I found quite a few eager girls looking for action near Venezia Mestre Railway Station as you exit the train in Vince [*sic*]. They are standing on the street late at night. You will need to approach them before they approach you. If you don't know how to speak Italian, show them some cash and they will know what you came for. The women I met in Italy have some of the most gorgeous bodies I've seen, and it really is worth the effort.

In ‘Mr. Big Shot’s’ post the discursive object on sex tourism that speaks out of the text, is that sex can be for sale. Thus, sex can take on different forms and one of these is that it can be a service. It is also said that sex for sale is something that can be more or less organized. This client says that you will find sex for sale if you know how to spot it. Hence, you have to

inhabit certain knowledge in order to find sex for sale. In the description of those who provides this, 'Mr. Big Shot' uses the terms 'girls' and 'women', and emphasizes their bodies and their eagerness. The prostitutes' gorgeous bodies are what make the effort of finding sex for sale worth it. Further, we see that this client uses different terminology to create and sustain the construction of sex as a service; Sex is for *sale*, it is not very *organized*, and you have to initiate the interaction with the girls by showing them *cash*. Based on these discursive objects, I suggest that this client is drawing upon the discursive resources of *market economy* a *heteronormativity*, frameworks of understanding that will be accounted for in the results section. How does drawing upon these discursive resources position 'Mr. Big Shot' as a subject in relation to the phenomenon of sex tourism? By placing sex as something that can be sold as a service, this sex tourist positions himself as a client in an economic exchange. This economic exchange places the client and the seller in a form of symmetrical position, where both gets something valuable out of sex tourism. Also, by emphasizing the girls' eagerness the client positions himself as wanted and desired. The girls are looking for action, and thus the client represents something positive to them.

So, which possibilities do these subject positions open up for when it comes to buying sex in the context of travel? By being positioned as a client in a market, this sex tourist says something about both parties involved in the transaction getting something valuable out of the exchange; the relation is in some way symmetrical. I argue that when constructing sex tourism upon the discursive resource of market economy, one limits the possibility for involving oneself in the relation in other ways than paying the money. Further, the client states that the girls are eager and looking for action, and thus that sex tourism constitutes something positive for the girls involved. This construction may close down or limit the possibility of taking into account potential negative aspects of selling sex. Now to the last point in the analysis. When making use of these subject positions: what is experienced about buying sex on holiday? Through the discursive objects in this post, I get the feeling that this client is preoccupied with sex tourism being an exchange both parties get something valuable out of. This is emphasized both in the mentioning of the cash that is paid, and in writing that the girls are eager and looking for action. Also, I find that he is clear on this being a form of sex that differs from other forms, and that this difference is based on the economical exchange. Through the subject positions in use I also get the feeling that this client experience power by being in the position of having the cash. He can openly desire the gorgeous bodies of these women, and then approach them with cash to initiate the sexual act. Thus, through the 6 steps in the analysis we can see that in the post by 'Mr. Big Shot' sex tourism is talked about as a market

where female prostitutes provides sexual services to male clients.

After now having accounted for how I have used the method to analyze the posts, I will continue with some reflections from the data analysis process.

Thoughts and experiences from the data analysis

I found Foucauldian discourse analysis to be a time consuming and complex methodology. The concept ‘discursive resource’ is vague and challenging to grasp, and through the whole research process I had to be careful not to lose focus on the aim of the analysis. Thus, I had to concentrate not only on the content of the posts, but especially on seeing the underlying frameworks of understanding that were present in the content. At times it was also a challenge not to read too much into the text. For, when can we really say that a discursive framework is present in a statement? What are the criteria for saying that a client draws upon a certain framework of understanding in his talk on sex tourism? I found that the best way to ensure that a discursive resource was present in a statement was to compare the statement to established definitions of these frameworks of understanding, and also to include many statements so that the research process was transparent to the reader. Also, I narrowed the search criteria down to the statements entailing ideas or principles from the discursive resources, to make it clear that *elements* from the frameworks of understanding were present in the statements

Even though Foucauldian discourse analysis proved to be complex, I found the method to be a fruitful analytical tool in exploring the normative world of sex tourists. Through the six steps in Willig’s version of the analysis, I felt that I reached a lot of information on the frameworks of understanding underpinning the act of buying sex, even though some posts were quite short. Thus, I found the analysis effective in that the steps opened up for different layers of meaning in the language used by the clients. The content of the web page, on the other hand, proved to be a challenge. As sex tourism is a phenomenon that involves people in vulnerable situations, the process of analyzing was at times quite uncomfortable. Most of the posts are describing sexual acts down to the smallest details, and some clients are telling stories of sadism. Reading this intimate ‘sex talk’ was at times challenging and on several occasions I felt nauseated, provoked and sad. Luckily I found that taking a break from the material helped. Also, these emotions did in a way help motivate me to continue the analysis, because I found that the sad stories illustrated the necessity of

exploring the frameworks of understanding underpinning the act of buying sex on holiday. In addition, the question of *how* buying sex from people in a vulnerable situation can make sense motivated me to ignore the unpleasantness the material evoked, and rather focus on the sex tourists' ways of thought.

I have now accounted for the methodology of the study, and will move over to presenting the results of the analysis.

Results

What understandings of sex tourism are present when the act of buying sex from a person in a vulnerable situation makes sense? It goes without saying that through the analysis I do not seek to grasp the entire complexity of thoughts, feelings and possible conflicting rationalizations involved in the choice to buy sex. I find that this would be impossible when studying the posts on this web page. Also, grasping a complete understanding is of course an utopian aim for a single scientific study. The aim of this analysis is rather to provide *some insight* into the frameworks of understanding underpinning the decision to buy sex.

Building upon social constructivist and post structural epistemology, I argue that the clients' stories represent certain social constructions of sex tourism that in themselves are drawing upon elements from available discursive resources. Thus, the posts on the web page can be understood as 'windows' out to the world of discursive resources that are present within a certain context. In this case the context is that of the Western world, as the clients most likely are North- American. Through the analysis I have identified four discursive resources that I consider to be of special importance in the constructions the clients on this web page hold of buying sex. Among these, *market economy* is the discursive resource that is most widespread in the clients' writings, and consequently this frameworks of understanding will receive most attention in the analysis. I will now present the four discursive resources, and give examples of how the clients draw their constructions upon elements from these. I will first concentrate on each individual discursive resource, before addressing how the different social constructions work together in what I call 'webs of meaning' present on the web page. All the way through this process there will be an emphasis on the subject positions that the discursive resources open, and on what is experienced through these.

1. A market economic construction of prostitution - Sex as a service

When paying for sex, what is bought? I believe that how one answers this question captures the essence of the discursive resources one bases ones understanding of buying sex upon. On the web page most clients express that they are buying a *service*. This is expressed by for instance referring to the girls as working, such as in the post by 'EZ_Rider' (Mexico): "I was in T.J. a few months ago looking for the hottest working girls on the scene". 'Easy_Rider' (Thailand) expresses the terminology on sex as a service the following way: "A fuck in a short time hotel is about 300-500 Baht as opposed to the 1,000 Baht normally. That will give

you about half an hour of bliss with housewives just out for grocery money”. Some clients explicitly talk about sex as a service, such as ‘Dirk’ in his travel- tale from Mexico:

I've been going to TJ for over 10 years, AB and Chicago Club are nice for looking but if you're in search of real GFE, kissing, bbbj and quality service the escort companies are best. Allow me to explain, while you'll pay about \$50 - \$80 for a rushed 30 minutes at the clubs like CC and AB, that's for one pop, without kissing and usually pretty clinical. The escorts usually charge \$150 for a full hour, the better services even give you extra time to shower and get undressed before starting the clock.

We see that ‘Dirk’ constructs prostitution as a *market* by using the term ‘service’, by talking about prices per the hour and by this to place himself in an evaluative position as a client. By referring to sex as a service, I suggest that he draws upon elements from the discourse of *market economy*; a thought that ” the market becomes an autonomous and self- regulating force; exchange no longer depends on ones social status, nor do prices depend on a social conception of the just” (Prasad, 1999). Versions of this discursive resource has as aforementioned been demonstrated in previous studies of clients’ online communication (Smette, 2003; Jahnsen, 2008) and the thought that sex can be a commodity to be exchanged in a market has also been expressed by clients in studies based on interviews (Prasad, 1999).

When spending money on a service, one also has the right to evaluate its quality. Positioning oneself as a client implies that one can evaluate the goods, so in a way the sexual experience has to be so good that it ‘deserves’ the money. The thought of getting *value for money* is expressed by most of the clients on the web page. ‘Mr. Big Shot’ (Aruba) for example, feels that he got value for his money: “She asked for \$50 to go all the way. She was definitely worth it”. ‘Slytraveler’ on the other hand, express that the sexual experience he had with two prostitutes was not worth the amount of money he paid: “They hurried me and it was a total rush job at premium prices” (Mexico). The term ‘rip of’ is mentioned by some clients and implies that you can pay too much money in relation to the value of the sexual service. In other words, this must mean that at some point the value of money and the value of the sex are considered equal. ‘DocLove’ (Indonesia) talks about value for money this way: “My advice is to get yourself a proper hooker from Blok M or Mangga Besar or wherever have your fun, pay and leave. Fuck ‘em hard....get your money’s worth”. So, he is saying that you have the *right* to get what you paid for; the money implies a right to get a certain expectation fulfilled.

Sex as a technique

The construction of sex as a service is also present in the clients' talk of sex as a *performance* by the prostitute. This is for example seen in the travel tale by 'derk' (Germany): "You might also note that recently due to the EU many Romanian and Bulgarian women have entered the FKK scene, World, Oase and the Palace are flooded with these poor service rip off women". Thus, to 'derk', sex is talked about as a performance that is mainly dependent on the prostitute. She is providing the service, hence she is responsible for the *quality* of the service. In this way the client places himself in a position where he has little or no influence on the quality of the sexual act; he is the *receiver* of the sex. The sexual experience then becomes dependent on the sexual qualifications, the *technique* in the prostitute's performance. This is a thought that is also expressed by 'joecoolfrog' (Thailand): "The girls providing the services in these places are employed for their experience and skill levels rather than their stunning good looks but there are very few unhappy customers".

A thought that is expressed on the web page is that when one is buying sex as a service, one is also buying the right to make the sexual experience only about oneself. 'Devok' who tells about his experience from Russia expresses this notion:

I picked out a blond, who was 19 years old. She agreed to spend the night with me for \$400. ... We took another shower, and I made her give me two more blow jobs before we called it a night.

The same idea is expressed by 'Dirk_Digger' (Indonesia): "After satisfied [*sic*] for the evening, I was still thirsty for more so I called 'Rose' back up and spend [*sic*] the next 4 days with her, where she kept me plenty busy and happy". We see that 'Dirk_Digger' has bought the right to get sexually satisfied, and by this also the right not to focus on the prostitute's sexual experience. I suggest that when sex is constructed as a service, the possibility for sex being about mutuality and reciprocity is closed down. The client is positioned as the one who is to experience pleasure; he is not *expected* to please the other part in the sexual interaction.

The prostitute as a means to achieve a goal- Sexual and instrumental objectification

So, how does the client talk about the prostitute when positioning sex tourism within a market economic framework? The description the client gives of the prostitute tells something about how he constructs her as a person, as a prostitute, and also about how he gives meaning to the

act of buying sex. Through the data a *sexually objectified* construction of the prostitute appears. *Sexual objectification* refers to:” whenever a woman’s body, body parts, or sexual functions are separated out from her person, reduced to status of mere instruments, or regarded as if they were capable of representing her” (Fredrickson & Roberts 1997, p. 175). Examples of sexually objectified constructions of the prostitutes are seen in the following travel tales:

Casablanca is now better than Seamans, the girls are extremely beautiful, they look like supper [*sic*] model. My hat of to management, they did a great job in improving that place. The only thing though, they are a bit expensive Us 90 a girl. (‘spharma24’, Marocco)

This girl was about 20-21, curly blonde hair, beautiful green eyes, all natural c-cups, and a nice little tan, and silky-smooth skin. She didn't speak very much English, which can be commonplace in the R-L district depending on where your chick is from and her education. The chick was rather a little cold (a common thing in Germans) but they had many chicks who were more friendlier, but I wanted the hottest one. (‘Dirk_Digger’, The Netherlands)

After about three strip shows, this girl came out who really did it for me. She was wearing a G-string and had very tight ass, and nice boob job (‘EZ_Rider’ (Mexico).

‘spharma24’ talks about the prostitutes as if they were part of the interior at the brothel. ‘Dirk_Digger’ describes and evaluates the prostitute according to her looks, and the fact that he cannot communicate that much with her is of little relevance. Thus, the evaluation of her is to a small degree based upon her personality, but rather on what Smette (2003) identified in a study of online clients talk to be “... sandwich lists of specific body parts” (p. 68). Also by evaluating the prostitutes on the basis of the functions they provide for them, as a mean to achieve a goal, these sex tourists have instrumentally objectified the prostitute; “The objectifier treats the object as a tool of his or her purposes” (Nussbaum, 1995 p. 257).

Prasad (1999) argues that the market economic terminology on prostitution is effective, because the relations then are organized upon the principles of *commodity exchange*, which “offers freedom from the necessity of *appearing* selfless, generous, grateful, or otherwise sentimental...”(p. 185). Thus, she claims, that the principles of the commodity exchange morally *justify* both the act of buying sex, and also that one does not involve oneself

in the relation in other ways than paying the money. I support this argument in suggesting that the market economic construction of sex tourism fosters a sexually and instrumentally objectified representation of the prostitute, that leaves the client in a position where he is not expected to take into account the subjectivity of the prostitute or to critically reflect upon the phenomenon of sex tourism.

Dehumanizing the prostitute – “They come cheap and are over used”

Further, I suggest that when constructing sex as a commodity on a market, it is the service that is bought, not the person. This allows for seeing the prostitute’s body as the commodity that is to be evaluated, and thus to not take into account the prostitute as a *person*. Evaluations of the prostitute that are based on their function for the client are seen in the following travel tales:

It cost about \$70 USD to get laid in one of those Rio terms. Yeah they are worth a visit if you never seen one before. But go to Sold Gold or Play Woman in BA, and you'll get that pussy a whole lot easier for half as much. The only exception is Blacks. All for the girls there are without a doubt 9s to 10s. This is probably the most exclusive sex club in the world, and the women found there are beyond belief. You'll pay at least a \$100 USD for a session with a whore from Blacks. However, if you can afford women like that, it can't be beat. (‘Roamer’, Argentina)

Phnom Penh is the place to be if you go for younger girls. I will not say how young they are, but you won’t find them like this anywhere else. That is just the good part though. The sex parlors are shadier than what I’m used to in Bangkok. The girls are mostly Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Chinese. They come cheap and are over used. (‘Mr_ BigShot’, Cambodia)

Are these clients talking about human beings or objects? We see that ‘Roamer’ and ‘Mr_ BigShot’ are occupied with the quality and price of the service, they are not talking about the possible reasons for poor service or “cheap and over used” prostitutes. Also, in a way, they are not expected to take this into account; they are evaluating a service and expecting value for their money. I argue that the sexually and instrumental objectified construction of the prostitute, fostered by the market economic discourse, contributes to a *dehumanization* of her.

Dehumanization refers to a process of divesting people of “agentic and communal aspects of humanness” which results in a loss of “capacity to evoke compassion and moral emotions” (Haslam, 2006 p. 245). Dehumanization is an aspect I will elaborate on in the discussion of the results.

Cynical and greedy prostitutes

In the data, there is also another construction of the prostitutes that supports the terminology on sex as a commodity provided in a market, namely that where the prostitutes are talked about as cynical and greedy people that will use the clients as means to get as much money as possible. ‘DocLove’ (Indonesia) builds on this construction in the following statement:

There’s no need for you to get messed-up in this psycho-drama shit of their complicated sad-story lives. They are not interested in you as they "pretend" to be because the bottom line here is cash. At the end of the day they are all prostitutes no matter what their game is or how much they say they love you” ... Don’t fall prey to these women. They make you feel like gods, but they actually think of you as shit, a source of cruel fun, and a cash cow for them (and possibly their family).

We see that this client ascribes to the prostitutes that they, as a group, are not interested in the clients for other purposes than the money. Also, by saying that they in the end of the day are prostitutes he does claim that prostitutes ought to be treated according to their role, and that this in a way is inconsistent with actually loving a client. ‘RollingLucky’ (Indonesia) expresses a similar consideration of the prostitutes:

So that's why I tell you guys never to pay more than a reasonable amount as I described above. And if you are wiring her money, odds are at least one other guy is as well, plus she's sleeping with any dude who will cough up the cash for the night. So don't be a sucker and use your head when it comes to your wallet.

I suggest that the construction of sex as a service allows seeing the prostitute as someone who is going to make as much money as possible from her work. Also, the representation of the prostitute as cynical and greedy works to position the client as a possible victim; he has to be careful not to be taken advantage of by the prostitutes. This form of *hatred* towards the prostitutes leaves the client in a place where he is almost doing the prostitutes a favor when

buying sex from them. The client is giving the prostitutes what they would go to great lengths to get, and in this way the act of buying sex is framed as an ethically acceptable behavior. Also the client is placed in a favorable light where he is not doing anything wrong, but rather must protect himself from prostitutes that will cynically use him as a means to achieve a goal.

We have now seen that on the 'sex travel guide' the sex tourists draw upon elements from a market economic discourse. This terminology comes to expression through different discursive objects that together create and maintain the thought that sex is a commodity that can be exchanged in a free market. The statements expressed on the web page suggest that when drawing upon this discursive resource, the prostitute is sexually and instrumentally objectified, something that I have argued might lead to a dehumanization of her. Also, we have seen how following the principles of the commodity exchange limit the possibility of involving oneself in the relation in other ways than paying the money. As argued by Prasad (1999), the act of buying sex comes out as morally justified. For if sex can be a commodity exchanged in a market, a clean cut and fair deal for both parties involved in sex tourism, why not buy sex?

2. A colonial ideology

Sex tourism is in most cases an encounter between people from different culture- historical backgrounds. This point can be illustrated by looking at the case of Thailand, which is the country that has received the most attention in sex tourism studies. Thailand represents a context where sex tourism very much is rooted in the country's reputation of being a "rest and relaxation" destination, a representation that was developed with the arrival of US military in Asia in the 1960-70s (Carter & Clift, 2000 p.11). Skrobanek, Boonpakdi & Jantakeero (1997) argue that: "Thailand is like a stage where men from around the world come to perform their role of male supremacy over women and their white supremacy over Thai people" (p. viii). Thus, the researchers point to the importance of the history of the power-relations between the two nationalities that are brought together in the sexual encounter.

Within the data material we can see representations of the prostitutes that emphasize their ethnic backgrounds, and the power relations between the prostitutes and the clients. An example of this focus is observable in the following travel tale by 'Jako' (Thailand): "Asian women are really passionate and they love to have sex with foreigners". Thus, this client

ascribes to the prostitute, on the basis of her ethnicity, the characteristic of being sexually passionate. Also, 'Jako' positions himself as desired based on the relation between Asian women and foreigners. I argue that this construction draws upon what O'Connell Davidson (1995) terms a *colonial ideology* (p. 55). In her study of British sex tourists in Thailand, she argues that there was a tendency to romanticize the Thai woman into a subordinate and 'willing to please' - character based on the *relation* between the Asian woman and the white man; "Through the lens of their 'racism', these men interpret virtually everything that Thai women do as a mark of their desire to serve" (p. 56). Further, O'Connell Davidson argues that among the men in her study, the colonial ideology became apparent through their construction of themselves as desirable to Thai women based on the quality of being white men. As we have seen in the statement by 'Jako', he is positioning himself as attractive for Asian women because he is a foreigner. Apparently being a foreigner is a quality that turns Asian women on independent of the looks and personality of the man. Through the account of 'Jako', selling sex becomes a pure pleasure for the prostitutes, and by that prostitution is a win-win situation for both seller and buyer. Consequently the act of buying sex from Asian women is ethically acceptable. For, what could possibly be problematic about buying a sexual favor from a woman who loves it?

So, what is experienced by virtue of the position 'Jako' constructs for himself? By using the term "love to have sex with foreigners" it seems that this client experiences being desired. Also, I get the sense that he is experiencing some sort of power, by representing something that Asian women find attractive. 'Dirk_Digger' (Indonesia) expresses a similar experience:

I still wanted at least one of the 20 girls who envied Rose when I took her to a Jakarta nightclub one night. In Indio, for a girl having a white, western [sic] male for a boyfriend or husband is a dream come true because [sic] Indo. men treat them so poorly. These women will be extremely [sic] loyal to you if you treat them with respect.

'Dirk_Digger' positions himself as attractive by contrasting his ethnicity of being white and Western to that of being Indonesian. The Indonesian women's preference for Western men lies in the *contrast* between Western and Indonesian men. In this way, 'Dirk_Digger' says something about his ethical reflection in relation to buying sex; he represents a better alternative for Indonesian women than Indonesian men. Through the lens of this construction, sex tourism comes out to be a pleasurable experience for both parties involved; the client gets

to have sex and the Indonesian prostitute gets to live out her dream. Sex tourism then, is talked about as ethically acceptable. I suggest that when drawing upon this elements from a colonial ideology, there are few possibilities made available for critical reflection on the act of buying sex. For if one has the chance to fulfill an Indonesian woman's dream by paying her for sex, why not buy?

3. An individualistic framework of understanding - Buying sex as a tourist activity

The web page is claimed to be an informative travel guide to commercial sex, and by this I argue that it has placed buying sex within a market economic discourse: sex is a commodity that is available within the 'tourist- package'. This construction is supported by the general tourist information that is available on the web page. Next to information about temperature, hotels and restaurants in Thailand, one finds information about the commercial sex the location has to offer. I argue that when constructing commercial sex as a tourist activity, one is in addition to the market economic construction drawing upon an *individualistic* discourse. According to Hofstede (1980) individualism refers to a focus on 'rights above duties, a concern for oneself and immediate family, an emphasis on personal autonomy and self-fulfillment, and the basing of one's identity on one's personal accomplishments' (Oyserman, Coon & Kemmelmeier, 2002 p. 10). As we have seen, a thought within the market terminology on sex tourism is that the money implies a right to put oneself in focus as the one whose sexual experience matters. I suggest that this thought also draw upon ideas from an individualistic discourse. The thought of "right above duties, and concern for oneself" can for example be observed in the travel tale by 'bobthi' (Costa Rica):

I have visited the Hotel Del Rey about six [sic] times. The first time I paid a little to [sic] much but had a good time. ... I one absoulty [sic] adorable Tica spend two and a half days for 400.00. She was so great I even tipped her an extra 100.00. And most of them will allow you to pull out the ole camera. Main Rule- Set the deal while in the bar (what you want, how long, how much extra for her friend or what ever).

We see that this sex tourist is preoccupied with *his* experience of the sexual encounter, with setting the deal so that the experience becomes gainful and pleasurable for *him*. Thus, this sex tourist is placed as the one who is in focus and control in the sexual interaction, a subject position that I argue allows for a feeling of power. Further, I argue that the individualistic discourse becomes visible through the construction of buying sex as a tourist activity one can *treat* oneself to. This thought comes to expression in two ways on the web page; first there is the construction of commercial sex as a way to have fun, second there is the idea that buying sex is a relaxing activity:

It was spring break 2002. I was still in school, and decided I needed some kicks. So me and a buddy of mine rolled on over to Vegas for the weekend. The slots were fun, but I was looking for something better. I had heard that prostitution is legal in all the surrounding counties of Las Vegas. There was this one place, called Sheri's Ranch, which I saw on the internet. It seemed worth checking out. ('Long_Johnsen', USA)

I was called up for a job in DR, so I stayed at this "so so" hotel in puerto plata, after the job I needed to relax "BIG TIME", you know sometimes you just gotta forget al your problems a business and getaway from all of it. I went on the net and found this nice place called Charlisangels. ('Nigel34', the Dominican Republic)

These posts indicate that buying sex is constructed as something positive and enjoyable that one can treat oneself to when searching for pleasurable feelings. I argue that this very much fits the essence of tourism, which one might say precisely is about allowing oneself to be in focus, and about relaxing and having fun in the exploration of what the culture on the location has to offer. 'Long_Johnsen' places commercial sex in the same dimension as the Las Vegas slots, as an arena where *he* can seek out pleasurable feelings, where *he* can experience kicks. Thus, buying sex is about *him*. 'Nigel34' emphasizes his hard efforts at work, and indicates that he has a *right* to relax. Through buying sex, he can "get away from it all". I find myself thinking that the terminology used by this sex tourist bear resemblance to the L'Oreal slogan "Because I am worth it", which is a phrase one might say captures the core of individualism.

Further, I suggest that the individualistic discourse is more thoroughly illustrated if we contrast these two statements to a *community* oriented framework of understanding, which values solidarity and social obligations, and which emphasizes the importance of community in the struggle for individual well-being (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). For 'Long_Johnsen' and 'Nigel34' buying sex is very much about their desire and right to experience certain

feelings, and very little about mutuality, relation and social responsibility. Thus, these sex tourists draw upon elements from a discursive resource that limits possible obligations as citizens of the world.

So through these accounts, how are the sex tourists positioned? By saying that he “needed some kicks” ‘Long_Johnsen’ talks about himself as a guy looking for fun, as a carefree and cool “buddy” rolling to Vegas in the search for the kind of “kicks” that sex with a prostitute provides. Through this subject position I get the feeling that he experiences a form of self-worth and freedom in that he is talking about sex tourism as a way for *him* to experience a pleasurable feeling. Thus, he can follow his desire to have fun and he is not obliged to take into account the prostitutes subjectivity. What is experienced through the subject position that ‘Nigel34’ takes on? This sex tourist talks about himself as a hardworking businessman that deserves to relax. I sense that this client feels good about himself through taking on this position; he is rewarding himself for a hard day of work, he deserves to relax and he deserves to put himself in center.

I argue that the individualistic discourse is present in the construction of sex tourism as a tourist activity one can treat oneself to, and that this opens up for commercial sex being positive and ethically unproblematic. The construction of buying sex as ethically unproblematic can be observed in the travel tale of ‘E_Z Rider’: “Campo is an action packed place -- lots of dancing, drinking, laughing, and fucking... Campo is perhaps the most amazing sexual playground I have been to yet...”(Curacao). I suggest that when buying sex is constructed as an activity in the same line as dancing and laughing, there are limited possibilities opened up for critical reflection upon buying sex. For if buying sex can be an arena for treating oneself to pleasurable and well-deserved activities, or a sexual playground to indulge oneself in, why not pay for sex?

4. Heteronormativity

Within a social constructionist framework of understanding “... what counts as sex; where, when, and with whom one has sex; as well as the meanings attributed, and the experiences of, sex ...” (Braun, Gavey, & McPhillips, 2003 p. 237) is understood as socially constructed. So, upon what discursive resources are sex and gender constructed in the posts, so that buying sex makes sense? By studying how the clients talk about the sexual act, what they choose to

emphasize and what is not mentioned, we can explore how sex and gender are constructed and by this what gendered subject positions are opened.

The web page is concerned with heterosexual sex as defining the sexual relation, and thus draws upon a *heteronormative* discourse; “the view that institutionalized heterosexuality constitutes the standard for legitimate and expected social and sexual relations” (Ingraham 2006, p. 315). The web page does not contain opportunities to identify with other sexual orientations, and thus presents the heterosexual relation as the way to ‘do’ sex. So how do the clients talk about themselves and the prostitute as participants in a sexual act? How are the sex tourists ‘doing’ sex? Through the data a construction of the man as being the active and dominant part during the sexual act, and the woman as the passive part that is to ‘be taken’, is demonstrated. An example of this construction is observable in the travel tale by ‘RollingLucky’ (Jakarta): “But these girls put out. Most of the ones i’ve [*sic*] been home with will let you fuck them twice for the session”. Also, we can observe this terminology in the statement by ‘EZ-Rider’ (Mexico): “I bent her over on the side of the bed and took her as fast as I could. She was really turning me on. I was kind of drunk at the time, so I didn’t do anything fancy”.

Script formulations on masculine and feminine sexual roles

Script formulations are “... kinds of talk which describe events as following a routine and predictable pattern” (Edwards, 1997, p. 21). I will use this concept when exploring the discursive resources the clients draw on concerning gendered sex roles. Some might question the use of a cognitive based concept within discourse analysis, but I find it to be a relevant analytical tool based on the ‘turn to language’ in this specific version of script- theory. The concept of ‘script formulations’ is placed within a discourse analytical perspective in that it is not concerned with cognitive structures, but rather with the social meaning that is ascribed to a phenomenon through *talk* (Frith & Kitzinger, 2001). Scripts then, are not retrieved from cognitive schemas, but rather actively *produced* through interaction.

I argue that the clients in the previous examples could be understood to be building on a script formulation that constructs a masculine sex role as the active and dominant part, and the feminine sex role as the passive part. Thus, the masculine way to “do” sex is to take the lead and the feminine way to “do” sex is to passively receive. I suggest that this terminology bear resemblance to the script formulations on sex roles that are present in heterosexual

pornography, where the storyline often portray “ male dominance and female submission...”(Jensen, 1994 p. 33). More explicit references to pornography are also present in the data material, such as in the accounts by ‘Diver1’ (Canada): “I spotted this gorgeous Inuit girl with a huge rack no shit, this chick could have been a porn star!!!”. ‘Slappy’ (Czech Republic) emphasizes the following event, which I argue just as well could have been a scene in a pornographic movie, in his description of sex with a prostitute:

When I pulled out at the end, they let me take of the condom and spill my juices all over the other girls face. She kept her mouth closed, but it was still more exciting than I’m used to. I’ll be back again for sure.

What discursive resource might this ‘porn talk’ be drawing upon? O’Connell Davidson (1995) argues that “British sex tourists find in their sex tourism the opportunity to become truly ‘masculine’ ” (p. 52). When buying sex in Thailand, she claims, they obtain control and power, they are allowed to carry out a masculinity that is available in this specific context. I follow this line of thought, when suggesting that the masculine sex role script formulation available on the web page could be said to draw up on the “normative blueprint” (Sharp & Earle, 2007 p. 11) for masculine identities identified by Kimmel (1990), which emphasizes affective distance, risk taking and aggression. So, what could be experienced when drawing upon this ‘normative blueprint’ on male sexuality? Through the quotations above, one certainly gets the feeling that these sex tourists experience *power*: the subject position entails the opportunity to demand, to expect and to control. Also, I sense that placing oneself as the ‘doer’ of the sex enables one to be the one whose pleasure is the centre of attention. Thus, that the client is the one whose experience matter, without feeling the weight of obligation to reciprocate.

The sexual experience in prostitution as based on mutual desire – a romantic discourse

Another construction of sex tourism, that I argue draw upon ideas from heteronormativity, is the discourse on sex gaining its meaning through the heterosexual *relationship*; through the mutuality of the sexual experience and the emotional connectedness that takes place between a man and a woman. I suggest that this draws upon elements from a *romantic discourse*,

which holds that the heterosexual relation is the paradigm for romantic love (Wetherell, 1995). 'Kingko' draws upon the romantic discourse in his travel tale from Thailand:

... it was her desire to be with me at this moment rather than the call of money as I might have mistaken her when she showed up, she was so aggressive at me the way she deep tongued me, as if she had loved me a long time...

How does 'Kingko' position himself when constructing the sexual experience as based on mutual desire and emotional connectedness? The subject position opened by this construction certainly is a favorable one. This sex tourist talks about himself as desired, and by this prostitution becomes a positive experience for both client and prostitute. Plumridge, Chetwynd, Reed & Gifford (1997) argue that constructing the sexual experience in paid sex as based on mutual desire constitute an effective *self serving justificatory interpretive schema*. I follow this line of thought when arguing that constructing sex tourism as an arena for a mutually satisfying sexual and emotional experience closes down the possibility for critical reflection on sex tourism, and thus open up for buying sex being a positive and non-problematic activity. Further 'Kingko' (Thailand) talks about himself as giving the prostitute a good time: "For quite long that it seemed to me that we had been fighting each others for some kinds of debt we both owed each others, she fainted with lust and crave..." I argue that when drawing upon ideas from a romantic discourse, such as I find that 'Kingko' does in this statement, there are limited possibilities for critical reflection made available. Thus, the act of buying sex is presented as ethically acceptable. For if the prostitute enjoys the sexual experience to the degree that she faints with lust, why not buy sex?

How do the discursive resources work together in giving meaning to buying sex?

In the data that have been discussed so far, I have focused on each individual discursive resource that has come to expression throughout the posts. I will now explore how the clients draw upon principles from the different discursive resources in their arguments, and how the constructions *work together* in constituting 'webs of meaning' that give such a meaning to sex tourism that buying sex comes out as a behavior that makes sense.

'Webs of meaning'

The market economic discourse is present in most of the posts in the data material. If we were to extract this discursive resource from these quotations, most of the arguments would pretty much fall apart. For if not constructing sex as a commodity, what is being bought when paying for sex? Power? A body for a certain amount of time? The right to take advantage of a person? Thus, the market economic discourse might be said to constitute the 'skeleton' in most of the available constructions of sex tourism on the 'sex travel guide'. A relevant question, which will be accounted for in the discussion of the results, is why this discursive resource is so central in these sex tourists' travel tales? Further, the market economic discourse is often tightly interwoven with the individualistic discourse. The terminology on sex being a commodity transacted in a market, is frequently followed by a right to focus on oneself as being the one whose pleasure is the centre of attention. I believe that this 'web of meaning' is present in the following travel tale by 'Slytraveler' (Mexico):

To make a long story short, when I was there on the 21st, I spent \$220 US on two young nice looking hookers whom I fucked at the same time. They were the ones standing outside as I didn't go into any bars or clubs. They were dressed as schoolgirls. They won't let you do much and every little thing I wanted to do was extra. To take their tops off was extra. I had to pay for an hour for both even though I barely got half that.

Thus, we see that 'Slytraveler' through drawing upon ideas from the market economic and the individualistic discourse, talk about sex tourism as a market where paying an amount of money involves a right for *him* to get sexually satisfied. Also apparent in this statement is the heteronormative discourse that comes to expression through the prostitutes being female, and through the script formulation of the male sex role as dominant and the female sex role as submissive. Actually, one could say that the heteronormative framework of understanding is interwoven with all the other discursive resources present on the web page, as the 'sex travel guide' is concerned with heterosexual sex tourism. I suggest that heteronormativity 'fit' well into the thought on sex being a commodity available in a tourist package, in that paying a woman for sex allows for placing her in a submissive position where the sexual experience is concentrated on the client's pleasure. Thus, I argue that the discursive resources support each other in making available 'webs of meaning' that present the act of buying sex as a behavior that makes sense.

A summary of the results

How do the sex tourists on the web page give meaning to paying for sex? The sex tourists on the web page present the act of buying sex as ethically acceptable. The data indicates that they do so through drawing upon ideas from market economy, colonialism, individualism and heteronormativity in their constructions of buying sex in the context of travel. Consequently, the sex tourists are positioned as clients in a free market, as adventure- seekers, as dominant and powerful men, or as sexually attractive based either on their bare presence or on their ethnicity. Through these subject positions the sex tourists express experiences of power, of being desired and of being emotionally distanced from the prostitute. Also, as the act of buying sex is presented as ethically unproblematic on the 'sex travel guide', I argue that through posting experiences on commercial sex on the web page the sex tourists might experience themselves as normal. I will now discuss these experiences further, but first I will start by addressing some methodological issues that need to be taken into account when discussing and drawing conclusive remarks from the results.

Discussion

Methodological discussion

Internet as data

How can internet- posts be used as data in research? Would for example an interview produce different and more nuanced data? As previously discussed the amount of research on the perspective of the sex tourist is limited, and the studies that have been carried out are most often based on interviews with self- selected samples. I find that this is an argument for exploring the normative world of the sex tourists, as naturalistic observation research may enable us to approach the perspective of the sex tourist. Foster (1996) claims that observational research can have certain advantages over interviewing; Firstly, the data can be collected by the researcher without relying on retrospective or anticipatory accounts of others that may create biases in the data. Secondly, a researcher may observe aspects that is difficult for participants to explain in an interview, thus some aspects might need a researcher to “see the familiar as strange” (p. 59). I suggest that this is a relevant point in the present thesis, as it might be a challenge to grasp how one is positioned within certain frameworks of thought. The third argument made by Foster refers to the fact that some people are more unlikely to participate in research. Observational research might in some cases be the only way to reach specific groups of people, as is likely to be the case with the sex tourists in the present thesis.

Paccagnella (1997) points to a possible methodological weakness when claiming that qualitative analysis on online discourse suffers under not being able to take into account the context in which the statements have been uttered. Thus, that when a person that has not been involved in the interaction reads the statements on the web page, there is a risk for losing part of the meaning. This is an important perspective to address when discussing the results. How are we to interpret the data retrieved from the web page, when A) The web page is likely to foster certain ways of *self- presentation*, and B) When there is limited access to the context of the statements uttered?

Self- presentation within the context of the web page

Research has indicated that ‘sex talk’ among men serves different functions. It could be a negotiation of the boundaries for gender- appropriate behavior for young men and young women (Lees 1993), it could provide an ideal of desirable masculinity (Wood, 1984), and it could produce heterosexual hierarchies (Kehily & Nayak, 1997). Smette (2003) argues that in her study of clients’ online communication, the posts were written in a way as to establish and maintain a masculine companionship between the users of the webpage. This perspective is important to take into account when discussing the results of the present study. The members of the web page are unified around their experiences of buying sex. This implies that they might present themselves according to an expected social role, and that they might express this role within an expected terminology. Thus, the topic of the web page may foster certain ways of *self- presentation*, our eagerness “to present ourselves in ways that make a good impression” (Myers, 2004 p. 105). This means that when analyzing and interpreting the posts one has to consider them in relation to what might be expected and idealized ways to present oneself within the context of a ‘sex travel guide’ web page. The way the clients are expressing themselves might therefore not reflect the specter of how the clients give meaning to buying sex. How the clients think about the act of buying sex is most likely to be more complex than what is expressed in their statements on the web page. So how can we use these posts to say something about the discursive resources sex tourists draw upon, when their constructions of the phenomenon are likely to be more complex than what is expressed in a few sentences on a web page? In other words, what is the relevance of the analysis?

Conflicting rationalizations

Although the clients are expressing themselves in a specific context, which might foster certain self- presentations, I argue that the statements are of relevance in that they display *available* discursive resources within this context. I believe, as aforementioned, that through the accounts on the web page one does not capture the complexity of the clients’ thoughts and feelings, the possible conflicting constructions of sex tourism, but capturing this complexity is not the aim of the study. Rather, the aim is to explore the discursive resources sex tourists draw upon and how these position the subject. It is therefore precisely the *expected* terminology that is of interest, as this tells us something about the discursive economy of

frameworks of understanding available in this context. Getting access to the context of the statements uttered then is not of primary interest in the thesis.

Subjectivity

As I have accounted for earlier, the epistemological frameworks that this study rests upon holds that the concept of knowledge is socially constructed, and thus these frameworks refuse the positivist concept of objectivity. The study is also based in an interpretative understanding of the role of the researcher, which holds that the researcher's frameworks of understanding forms data collection and data analysis by emphasizing certain aspects and omitting others. This implies that other researchers might get different results in a similar study, by for example approaching the topic with a different understanding of the phenomenon, and thereby focusing on other aspects of the data. To what degree does this affect the quality of the study? I have used a reflexive approach in an attempt to clarify my position on, and motivation for studying, sex tourism. I argue that this process of self- reflection works with the subjectivity, by making clear how I position myself to the phenomenon of sex tourism. I have also chosen to use many statements from the web page, and I have given an example of how I have used the method, so that the reader can follow the interpretation process. In this way, I argue that the study is transparent, and thus that the reader can critically evaluate the research process step by step.

Methodological weaknesses

What could be the limitations of Foucauldian discourse analysis in the exploration of the normative world of the sex tourist? As previously discussed, I found the method to be fruitful in that the steps in the analysis open up for different layers of meaning in text. On the other hand, I found it complex and vague in that it is difficult to establish when a discursive resource is present in a statement. By having compared the statements to established definitions on the discursive resources, I have strived to make the research process transparent. I suggest that for example thematic analysis could be a useful analytical tool in exploring sex tourists' online communication, as this might allow one to have a greater focus on the topics the clients address.

Discussion of the results

Buying sex in the context of travel is ethically acceptable

How does it make sense to travel to poor, underdeveloped countries to buy sex? What are the discursive resources sex tourists draw upon in their constructions of sex tourism? And through these constructions of sex tourism, how is the subject positioned, and what opportunities of experience do these subject positions entail? Just as the clients in the Earle & Sharp study (2007) portray buying sex as a normal and positive act, the sex tourists in this study present the act of buying sex as ethically acceptable. Through the data we have seen that the clients draw upon discursive resources that make available arguments on sex tourism that limit possible critical reflections on the act of buying sex. I argue that this is especially evident in the market economic construction of sex tourism, where the sex tourist's obligation is limited to paying the market price of the sexual favor. We can also see this limited possibility of critical reflection in the individualistic terminology that places buying sex as a fun/entertaining activity in the same line as dancing and drinking, in the romantic construction of sex tourism as a mutually satisfying sexual and emotional relationship, and in the arguments drawing upon the colonial ideology where the client is desired because of his ethnicity. For, as previously suggested, what could be wrong with buying sex when sex tourism is a win-win situation for both client and prostitute? In other words, why not buy a commodity/activity/service/sexual experience when it is a fair way of making a living or a pleasure for the seller to provide it? I suggest that the constructions of sex tourism available on the web page do provide meaningful arguments *for* buying sex. Thus, that if one sees through the lens of these 'webs of meaning', it absolutely makes sense to pay for sex. For if you can buy sex from a working woman as a 'clean cut' service on a market in the same line as buying a haircut, or give the prostitute a good time while at the same time paying her for a sexual favor, then why not buy sex?

Further, I argue that the design of the web page support the limited possibility for critically reflecting upon buying sex. As previously discussed the entrance criterion of the web page is to consent to the material displayed on the site. This builds an impression that all the participants on the web page completely agree with the act of buying sex, and thus there are no critical perspectives made available. In this way, the web page constitutes a context where buying sex is a *normal* and *acceptable* behavior. The web page has suspended *critical thinking*; it has prevented "negative information from reaching the group" (Passer & Smith,

2001 p. 511). The same tendency was demonstrated in the Earle & Sharp study (2007), and it is claimed by these researchers that:

The fact that writers clearly feel no need to justify their actions against hostile moral positions (which would almost certainly be the case if they discussed their actions in the wider community) suggests a moral world in which such debates have simply been bracketed out. (p. 28)

I suggest that if there were posts that addressed negative aspects of sex tourism, such as the poverty of the prostitutes or the prospective physical and psychological damages that selling sex could cause, other possibilities could be opened up and the constructions held by the clients might be challenged.

To sum this up, I argue that the constructions of sex tourism on the web page entail limited or no possibilities for critical reflection upon buying sex from people in a vulnerable situation, and that this normalized context might be supported by the prevention of critical thinking that is ensured by the entrance criterion. I will now continue with discussing what can be experienced by the sex tourists as bearers of the kind of knowledge that these discursive resources produce.

What is experienced through the subject positions taken on by the sex tourists?

Being normal, being desired, being powerful

The 'sex travel guide' constitutes a context where buying sex is talked about as a normal and ethically unproblematic behavior. Consequently the clients, who participate with their experiences on buying sex in this context, might experience themselves as normal. Earle & Sharp (2007) argue that participating in a context where buying sex is normalized neutralizes the treat paying for sex poses to male identity and sexuality. I follow this line of thought in arguing that when there are no critical voices available, no ethical concerns raised, one is not forced to take into account the negatively loaded characterizations that are associated with being a client. In other words, one might be allowed to distance oneself from the brand of deviance and by that possibly to regard oneself in a favorable light.

The possibility for regarding oneself in a positive light is also opened by the sex

tourists who talk about sex tourism as a mutually satisfying sexual and emotional relation. We have seen that some of the sex tourists draw upon discursive resources on sex tourism that place them in a subject position where they express being *desired* by the prostitute, either based on their bare presence or on their ethnicity. I follow the line of thought by Plumridge et al. (1997) that constructing prostitution as a mutually satisfying sexual relationship is effective in that it places the client in a position where the act of buying sex comes out as unproblematic:

The men are positioned in an almost wholly favorable light: free agents and participants in a wholly mutual emotional and sexual pleasure, they are provided with an ideal reading of their behavior to facilitate the experience of pleasure in commercial sex. (p. 177)

For, why should 'Kingko' (Thailand) not buy sex when the prostitute "was so aggressive at me the way she deep tongued me, as if she had loved me a long time"? And why take into account poverty and disadvantaged situations when: "In Indio, for a girl having a white, western male for a boyfriend or husband is a dream come true" ('Dirk_Digger', Indonesia)? I suggest that when constructing a prostitution- based relation as mutually satisfying, one is able to distance oneself from negative characterizations following buying sex, and thus to regard oneself in a highly favorable light. For when selling sex is pleasurable for the prostitute, the sex tourist is not a deviant, immoral 'punter', but rather a sexually attractive man who is desired by a woman.

The 'sex talk' on the web page express a 'normative blueprint' for male sexuality that emphasizes dominance, aggression and power. Through this script formulation on the masculine sex role the sex tourists are certainly positioned as powerful. The experience of power when buying sex was also reported by the sex tourists in O'Connell Davidson's study (1995), and she posts the question of:

Unless it is assumed that all men have some kind of biological drive to sexually possess as many women as possible (a view which sex tourists, along with sociobiologists, adhere to) then it is necessary to explain why these particular men have such a strong desire for this kind of control. (p. 53)

Further, she links the sex tourists desire for power to the matter that they are less equipped financially, physically and socially to establish a sexual relation to a British woman. By being

the one with the money, she argues, these sex tourists are in the position of choosing whom and how many women *they* desire to be with. Thus, they are placed in a position where they are in control of their sex lives. As we do not know anything about the men posting on the ‘sex travel guide’, we can only speculate about why they draw upon discursive resources that fosters an experience of power. However, I suggest that the experience of control and power might allow regarding oneself in a favorable light, while carrying out a behavior that in the general society is considered as immoral and bad.

Being emotionally distanced to the prostitute

Ryan & Hall (2001) argue that traveling is about “being out of context” (p. 74). The process of packing bags and taking a flight represents leaving the everyday life at home for new and different experiences. One might argue that this travel- process in itself could create a distance between the client and the prostitute that would contribute to it making sense to buy sex on holiday, perhaps more sense than to buy sex in the streets of ones hometown. What is interesting is that we have seen that most of the sex tourists in the study draw upon elements from a market economic discourse that allows emotionally distancing oneself from the prostitute, by not being expected to take into account her subjectivity.

Prostitution is often termed the oldest *profession* in the world. Consequently, the thought that sex could be a commodity exchanged in a market is not new, and as previously discussed the market economic construction of prostitution has been demonstrated in several studies of clients’ online communication (Smette, 2003; Earle & Sharp, 2007; Jahnsen, 2008). However, its implication for how the sex tourist gives meaning to the act of buying sex, and the subject position that is opened by it, needs more attention. Based on the outcome of the analysis in this study I have argued that when drawing upon a market economic framework of understanding, the prostitute is sexually and instrumentally objectified. Further, my claim is that this may lead to a process of emotional distancing oneself from her, to the degree of dehumanization. I will now elaborate on this argument by drawing upon a psychological theory on the relation between morality and dehumanization, namely that of *moral exclusion* (Opotow 1990).

Moral exclusion and dehumanization

As previously discussed, Prasad (1999) claims that within a market economic understanding of prostitution, the relation between seller and buyer is constructed upon the ethics of commodity exchange. Thus, “the morality of the market exchange” is guiding how the client makes sense of his act of buying sex (p. 181). I suggest that the ethics of the market can lead to a dehumanization of the prostitute by constructing her as a provider of a service, by instrumentally objectifying her as a means to achieve a certain goal. Opatow (1990) argues that our *scope of justice*, our “psychological boundary for fairness” (p. 478), guides how we behave toward a person. When we place a person outside the scope of justice: when we consider a person to be “expendable, undeserving, exploitable or irrelevant” (p. 478), we are *morally excluding* them. Thus, we are placing them: “outside the boundary in which moral values, rules, and considerations of fairness apply” (p. 1). I suggest that when constructing the prostitute as a provider of a service, there is minimal expectation for the client to take into account the prostitute as a person, and also no expectation to consider the possibility that these women are poor and in a vulnerable situation. Thus, that when sex is understood as a commodity, the prostitute can be viewed as expendable and irrelevant. Sex is separated from the person, and thus the prostitute can be placed outside the scope of justice. I will illustrate this suggestion with one aforementioned example. ‘Derk’ (Germany) states the following: “You might also note that recently due to the EU many Romanian and Bulgarian women have entered the FKK scene, World, Oase and the Palace are flooded with these poor service rip off women”. We see that in this statement it is not of relevance, nor of *necessity*, for ‘Derk’ to take into consideration why these women provide poor services. He talks about himself as a client on a market, and thus is expecting to get what he is paying for. The prostitutes are a means to a good sexual experience, and he is given ethical justification for not taking their stories into account.

Why is the market economic discourse so widespread in the constructions on the web page?

On the web page, the market economic discourse is present in nearly all the posts. This might partly be fostered by the design of the web page, which place the act of buying sex as a commodity available in a tourist package in the same line as rock- climbing and diving. Also, as I have now argued, drawing upon principles from market economy in the construction of

sex tourism allows emotionally distancing oneself from the prostitute, to the degree of dehumanization. As claimed by Prasad (1999), the morality of the commodity exchange provides ethical justification for buying sex, without feeling the obligation to take into account the prostitutes' subjectivity. I suggest that for a person buying sex, the market economic understanding is useful to draw upon, as it allows regarding oneself in a favorable light. For if we contrast this framework of understanding to an alternative construction of sex tourism, such as the thought that buying sex is paying for the right to take advantage of a person who is in a vulnerable situation with a few other alternatives than to sell his or her body: how would the latter position the client? As someone that is taking advantage of a person in a vulnerable situation? I would much rather see myself as a client buying a clean cut service, than as a person taking advantage of a person in a disadvantaged position. Thus, it would be easier to ethically justify the act of buying sex to *myself*, if I viewed it as a commodity exchange.

What is the contribution of this thesis to the social scientific study of sex tourism?

The aim of this study is exploring the discursive resources, the frameworks of understanding, which provides such a meaning to buying sex that it makes sense to do it. Thus, I have not focused on *specific* motivational arguments such as for example seeking out certain sexual favors or longing for intimacy, but rather on exploring the frameworks of understanding that *underpin* the decision to buy sex. The analysis demonstrates that the men who post messages on the 'sex travel guide' present the act of buying sex from women as ethically acceptable. We have for example seen that paying a young Cambodian girl for sex is talked about as buying a commodity in a market, that a prostitution- based sexual relation can be about mutual love and desire, and that one can buy sex as a relaxing and well deserved activity to treat oneself to. Thus, we have seen that through drawing upon certain discursive resources, buying sex from people in vulnerable situations can make sense. Also, we have seen that through the subject positions opened by the frameworks of market economy, individualism, heteronormativity and the ideology of colonialism, the clients express being normal, being desired, being powerful and finally being emotionally distanced from the prostitutes. I argue that all of these experiences contribute to regarding oneself in a favorable light, while carrying out a behavior that in the wider society is considered deviant and immoral.

Based on the results from this study, I suggest that the frameworks of understanding

that underpin the decision to buy sex are of relevance to study in further social scientific research on sex tourism. This, because exploring how the client give meaning to the phenomenon might provide us with an indication of how one could challenge these ‘webs of meaning’, and consequently with what arguments one can approach the sex tourist in the work of preventing destructive forms of sex tourism. Further I argue that the market economic discourse is of special interest to explore further, as this ethically justifies both buying sex and not taking into account the prostitutes’ subjectivity, something that might lead to a process of dehumanization.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored the discursive resources sex tourists draw upon in their accounts on sex tourism on a 'sex travel guide' web page, in an attempt to provide some insights into the question of how buying sex from people in vulnerable situations makes sense. The posts have been studied as 'windows' out to the world of discursive resources, and through these 'windows' the discourses of market economy, individualism, heteronormativity and the ideology of colonialism have appeared. The discursive resources are interwoven and work together in making available 'webs of meaning' that open for buying sex in the context of travel as ethically acceptable, whilst at the same time closing down possibilities for critical reflection upon buying sex. The client's talk about sex tourism as a commodity provided on a market, as a tourist activity to treat oneself to, as a sexual relation based on male dominance and female submission, and finally as a mutually satisfying sexual relation. Thus, the sex tourists are positioned as clients in a free market, as adventure- seekers, as dominant and powerful men, or as sexually attractive based either on their bare presence or on their ethnicity. These subject positions open up for experiencing being desired, being in power, being normal and finally for experiencing an emotional distance to the prostitute. I argue that these experiences contribute to a regarding of oneself in a favorable light, while carrying out a behavior that in the wider society is considered deviant and immoral. Based on the results from this thesis, I stress that it is of relevance to further explore the frameworks of understanding underpinning the act of buying sex, and especially the market economic discourse as I suggest that this ethically justifies both buying sex and not taking into account the prostitutes subjectivity, something that might lead to a process of dehumanization.

In a world that is becoming increasingly globalized through processes of migration and tourism, sex tourism has all the requirements for expanding. For, sex tourism does not only benefit the sex tourist, it is also inevitably entangled in national and international economy. What is of certainty however is that the commercial sex industry depend on a demand for prostitution- based sexual relations, to sustain its position and growth. This is a strong argument for further research on the psychological processes that underpin the decision to buy sex. Another argument for research on the phenomenon is the vulnerable position of the women and men involved in the commercial sex industry in poor, underdeveloped countries. It therefore represents a paradox that sex tourism has received so little attention within the social sciences in the Western world. One can only hope that there will be a greater focus on the phenomenon of sex tourism in the future.

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