

A PARADOX OF ILLEGAL LEGALITY:
ANALYSIS OF ONLINE ESCORT SERVICES ADVERTISING ON *BACKPAGE*

by

OLESYA VENGER

(Under the Direction of Tom Reichert and Peggy Kreshel)

ABSTRACT

Research on sex-related services advertising has explored to some extent their legality, but not compliance of their promotional tools with media clearance policies. As a result, many illegal offers are advertised by legal means. Exploring the landscape of online escort personals in the United States, this study investigates the correspondence of their content to the U.S. penal codes and online media's clearance.

Although frequently associated with controversial products and transformational advertising, research on sexual appeal has largely ignored escort services. This study examines how sexual appeal alongside informational and transformational appeals construct online personals for escort services as a repository of constantly contested economic, social, and legal relationships.

This study conducted a content analysis of 4,956 online personals published in a one-year period (July 2011- June 2012) in New York, Atlanta, Chicago, and San Francisco within the "escorts" section on *Backpage*, the most profitable online classifieds for escort services in 2012. By systematically examining the promotion of escort services, this study offers the coding framework for objective analysis of controversial services

advertising. Based on the results, the present study develops indicators for legality, clearance compliance, and professionalism, which provide insights to understanding the reasons for the success of online personals.

This study found that posters primarily adhered to media clearance and U.S. penal codes, with the exception of publishing photos of minors. Posters relied on self-censorship/cropping techniques to conceal their identities. Differences by geographic location were evident with examining poster race and escort service availability to members of other racial groups. Personals exhibiting features of legality and clearance compliance as well as legality and professionalism relied more on informational than transformational cues, with the exception of personals posted on behalf of the providers that contained disclaimers and prices, while featuring minors clothed in a sexually-revealing manner. Personals exhibiting features of clearance compliance and professionalism relied more on transformational than informational cues, with the exception of personals that employed techniques of self-censorship or cropping. Implications are presented, followed by future research recommendations for advancing research on legality and clearance compliance of escort services advertising, as well as professionalism in the industry for sex-related services.

INDEX WORDS: online personals, media clearance, penal codes, escort services, sex appeal, informational and transformational advertising.

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OLESYA VENGER

B.A., University of "Kyiv-Mohyla Academy," Ukraine, 2002

M.A., Marquette University, 2008

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OLESYA VENGER

Major Professor: Tom Reichert
Peggy Kreshel

Committee:
Leonard Reid
Roger Stahl
Spencer Tinkham

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May 2014

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
LIST OF TABLES	vii
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION, RESEARCH QUESTIONS, OVERVIEW	9
Introduction	9
Research questions	10
Overview	11
2 LITERATURE REVIEW	17
Sexual encounters	17
Marketing sexual encounters through online escort personals	25
Regulations on promotion of sexual encounters	34
Regulatory mix for advertising of controversial services	41
Advertisements for controversial services	51
Informational and transformational advertising research review	57
Sex appeal research review	63
3 METHOD	74
Sampling procedure	74
Units of analysis	76
Coding categories	78

Coders and coder training	90
Pilot study and reliabilities.....	91
4 RESULTS	97
Sample characteristics.....	97
Informational and transformational content in personals	112
5 DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH.....	136
Introduction.....	136
Content of online personals	139
Applying the model for advertising appeals to personals.....	150
Limitations	157
Implications.....	158
Future directions and extensions of research	160
Summary.....	165
REFERENCES	167
APPENDICES	
A Posting a personal in the escort section of <i>Backpage</i>	181
B Codebook	182

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 2.1: Subsections for Adult Sections of <i>Craigslist</i> and <i>Backpage</i> (2013)*	70
Table 2.2: Notice to Posters. Posting Rules, <i>Backpage</i>	71
Table 2.3: Notice about Clearance Compliance Requirements, <i>Backpage</i>	72
Table 2.4: Categories for Coding Dress Style	73
Table 3.1: Selection of Online Personals	93
Table 3.2: Professionalism, Legality, and Clearance in Personals and Ad Appeals	94
Table 3.3: Inter-coder Reliability Index (Text).....	95
Table 3.4: Inter-coder Reliability Index (Visuals).....	96
Table 4.1: Features of the Online Personals by City	121
Table 4.2: Features of the Escort Service	122
Table 4.3: "Code of Honor" for Clients	123
Table 4.4: Escort Service Provider's Description	124
Table 4.5: Appearance of the Escort Service Provider	125
Table 4.6: Demeanor of the Escort Service Provider	126
Table 4.7: Sexual Demeanor of the Escort Service Provider.....	127
Table 4.8: Escort Service Provider's Dress by Escort Service Provider's Face Visibility	128
Table 4.9: Visual Sexual Imagery in Online Personals	129
Table 4.10: Informational and Transformational Content (Legality/Clearance)	130
Table 4.11: Informational and Transformational Content (Legality/Professionalism) ...	131

Table 4.12: Informational and Transformational Content (Clearance/Professionalism).	132
Table 4.13: Escort Service Provider's Perceived Age by Escort Service Provider's Nationality.....	133
Table 4.14: Escort Service Provider's Perceived Age by Personal Ad Self-Censorship .	134
Table 4.15: Personal Ad Self-Censorship by Escort Service Provider's Dress	135
Table 5.1: Transformational and Sexual Ad Content for Controversial Services	156

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION, RESEARCH QUESTIONS, OVERVIEW

Introduction

Sex work and the promotion of sex work is illegal in most of the United States. Still, many individuals seeking sexual encounters are able to go to online classifieds to find, buy, and sell sex with the click of a mouse. The majority of online personals include promotional messages about what appear to be legal sex-related services (e.g., massage, escort); however, despite media clearance policies of online classifieds which prevent posters from publishing illegal offers, these messages frequently disguise sex solicitation. Online classifieds often allow marketing of illegal practices to flourish by ostensibly legal means.

Personals on *Craigslist* and *Backpage*, online classified sites owned by Craig Newmark and Village Voice Media respectively, enable posters to promote a variety of services. According to AIM Group (2013) that tracks five popular sites accepting online personals, the five sites made \$39.1 million in revenues in 2012. *Backpage*, one of the most popular online classified sites, accounted for 80.4% of that revenue, most of which came from publishing offers for sex-related services. A lot of studies on sex in advertising exist, but this study seeks to draw generalizations about sexual content of escort personals. To this point very few studies have addressed the issues of sex in advertising and the effectiveness of clearance policies (Boddewyn, 1985). Until these issues are addressed and research on them has received attention proportionate to the

popularity of online personals, it is unlikely that the problems surrounding the sex industry or the promotion of sex-related services will be understood, let alone resolved.

Research Questions

The overarching concern guiding this study is sex-related services' use of legal means to promote illegal sex-related services in online personals. The investigation of this paradox, illegal legality, begins with a systematic analysis of the content of escort services advertising on *Backpage*. Thus, the first research question is:

RQ1: What is the content of online escort advertising? What are the main attributes mentioned by escort services providers online?

RQ1a: How do escort service providers communicate their expertise?

RQ1b: Which traits do escort service providers emphasize most frequently?

RQ1c: What are the demographic characteristics of providers portrayed in escort service advertisements?

Online personals for escort services are complex media artifacts. Promoting a complex variety of controversial services, they communicate in a manner which serves the business needs of the poster and meets the informational and perhaps emotional needs of potential clients all the while negotiating legal and compliance policies. Two research questions relate the content of online personals to government mandates and media compliance.

RQ2: Do online personals violate U.S. penal codes (legality of the ads)?

RQ3: Does the content of online personals correspond to clearance policies of the media? Do online personals violate the media's clearance policies?

Online personals for escort services work in a variety of ways. Prior research on transformational and informational advertising appeals will contribute to understanding of the complexity of online personals. Answering the questions associated with informational and transformational advertising appeals will contribute to understanding the answers of the paradox of illegal legality. Accordingly, the next research question will aim at distinguishing different appeals in personals:

RQ4: Where in the informational/transformational theoretical framework do online personals fall?

Because the activity promoted by escort services is sex-related, an examination of sexual advertising appeals in the personals will contribute to interpretation of their content. Accordingly, this study poses the question:

RQ5: What is the role of sexual appeal in escort services advertising? Accounting for the role of sexual appeal in advertising of escort services, how is the framework for informational and transformational advertising could be used to elaborate on legality of and clearance policies applied to online personals?

Overview

The Internet has become the most popular medium for marketing sex. In 2012 *Backpage* made almost \$31.4 million in revenues from sales of online personals (AIM, 2013). Despite profitability, online classified advertising, just as it was for classified advertising in the 1970s (Lorimor, 1977), has received little research attention.

This study will focus on the dilemmas associated with selling and buying sex-related services through personals published in online classifieds. Most of the research on sex work thus far has focused on illegal services advertising, "neglecting contexts where

it is legal and regulated" (Weitzer, 2009, p. 213). This study is to fill this gap by exploring the content of online classifieds as legal media that allow the promotion of allegedly legal indoor sex-related services.

Reflecting legal complexities of sex work and promotional activities surrounding sex work, online classifieds have developed clearance policies. In theory then, online classifieds represent a promotional space for legal sex-related activities. However, as artifacts rich with meanings and social implications, personals for online escort services frequently transgress clearance policies, while sustaining themselves as profitable business ventures. To avoid administrative and in some cases criminal punishment (e.g., paying fine, risking the removal of the ads from a site), posters of personals work their way through the media's clearance policies by implying instead of listing prices and self-censoring their images.

Although a complete discussion of the promotion of sex-related services is beyond the scope of this project, this study will draw upon interdisciplinary research to improve understanding of escort services advertising in general and how personals for online escort services are used in particular. Juxtaposing streams of research from advertising, law, and sociology, this study will address the dearth of research on the promotion of allegedly legal indoor sex-related services, services advertising and sexual appeals, and advertising of controversial services online. Three streams of literature inform this study: (1) history of regulations for the promotion of controversial services and media clearance policies, (2) investigation of the content for escort services advertising as a branch of controversial services advertising, and (3) research on informational, transformational, and sexual advertising appeals.

In order to facilitate conversation of sex-related controversial services advertising, the primary concepts involved are clarified before outlining the relevant literature.

Among these concepts are: (1) sex work and prostitution, (2) escort and massage services, and (3) media clearance policies related to advertising of sex-related services.

The terms, sex work and prostitution, are often used interchangeably. Disciplines of sociology and mass communication have shaped the meaning of "prostitution" and "sex work" as "commercial sexual services, performances, or products given in exchange for material compensation" (Weitzer, 2000, p. 3). The term "sex work" is a product of the women's rights movements and an effort to avoid the marginalization of sex industry workers; the term is to exemplify sex workers' attempt to convey professional qualities, rather than suggesting lack of worth (ProCon.org, 2008). Hence, there is a distinction between "sex work" and "prostitution." The former represents an effort to practice social justice, whereas the latter is stigmatized.

Few studies in academic literature provide definitions of escort and massage services (Smith, Grov, Seal, & McCall, 2013) or recognize distinctions within each category (Bryant & Palmer, 1975). Yet these distinctions are important, because legality of sex-related services varies: sex work is illegal, massage service is not. As a result, posters have little option but promoting sex work services under the disguise of escort or massage services. In doing so, they remain in legal boundaries, while contributing to the growth of potentially illegal promotional activities.

This study provides context for thinking about escort services promotion in terms of a regulatory mix, a web of intricate relationships between government, self-regulation, media clearance, and consumer activism. These entities are complementary: each is better

equipped than others to handle particular situations. Media clearance, for example, has the advantage of preventing potentially misleading advertising from ever reaching the public. All components of the mix are needed to reach maximum regulatory potential. To better explain the regulatory environment surrounding escort services, this study provides elaboration on U.S. penal codes and transgressions regarding sex work promotion, details the environment contributing to the ineffectiveness of media clearance policies, and, finally, explores the self-regulatory procedures related to online classifieds.

The Advertising Self-Regulatory Council (formerly NARC and associated organizations), is the advertising profession's primary self-regulatory body. Advertising self-regulation (ASR) is defined as "the existence of a written code of ethics, conduct, standards, or principles or a written statement of policies, guidelines or procedures for the voluntary regulation of the advertising activities of...members" (LaBarbera, 1983, p. 132). Maitland (1985, p. 132) labels self-regulation as "corporate social responsibility," while Xuemei, Kitchen, and Cuomo (2011) distinguish between macro-level or national advertising industry ASR and micro-level or media ASR. Despite the illegality of sex work and its promotion, media clearance policies, a form of media self-regulation, play a vital role in the regulatory mix for legal escort services online.

The discussion here will proceed in the following manner: the next chapter outlines the literature review, highlighting the historical and marketing roots of controversy associated with online personals and escort services. The first section of that review will contextualize escort personals within services advertising. Rather than promoting the brand or product associated with it, service advertising focuses on building consumer awareness and interest with respect to the services. Providing a

framework for exploring controversial services advertising and online personals, this section documents the studies that acknowledge different needs of services as opposed to branded goods, pointing out that research on services advertising has received considerably less attention. Additionally, literature on posters' motivations determining their involvement in the promotion of escort services and their choices for advertising strategies contributes to understanding online personals as media artifacts, rich with social, economic, legal, and emotional meaning.

Second, an historical examination of sex-related services marketing in the United States is presented as a context to this study. Special consideration is given to the regulations and practices of selling/buying sex before the existence of the Internet and after. Online possibilities for communication and dissemination of information are outstripping the ability to regulate the Internet. This is especially true in the case of publishing illegal content. The content analysis conducted here is also situated within the self-regulatory framework for online media in the United States, determining if the content of personals corresponds to media's clearance policies.

The third body of literature investigates attributes of informational and transformational, as well as sexual advertising appeals. Despite relatively rich findings provided in the services advertising literature, the research has been conducted primarily within the context of informational and transformational appeals, but not sexual appeals. Although the proportion of magazine ads using sex to sell brands and services has increased from 15% in 1983 to 27% in 2003 (Reichert, Childers, & Reid, 2012), the notion that sexual appeal is effective only in advertising low-risk products and services purchased by impulse buyers remains prevalent. Reichert et al. (2012) concluded that

sexual appeals in advertising high-risk, informational products and services are ineffective (e.g., financial services). However, the questions about the use of sexual appeal in ads featuring high-risk services that use either transformational or both informational and transformational advertising appeals have been unexplored, despite the fact that such services as entertainment and beauty have been "responsible for much of the increase" of sexual appeal in advertising (Reichert et al., 2012).

Given that escort services are related to both beauty and entertainment industries, the study of escort services could provide further insight into the sexual appeal literature. In sum, an exploration of the literature in services advertising, online personals, and advertising appeals will examine extant knowledge in these areas, providing a more grounded approach to analyzing the online escort personals as controversial vehicles for successful promotion of services. Situated at the core of the contested nature of sex-related services advertising, this study provides a three-dimensional lens through which a comprehensive view on online personals on *Backpage* is possible.

The content analysis described in the third chapter on method discusses the coding procedures and codebook, links content analysis variables in the three broad areas of legality, clearance, and professionalism, as well as identifies commonalities between attributes of online personals. The fourth chapter on results details the content of personals, providing a discussion of interrelations between variables. Exploring media's clearance policies, the fifth chapter on discussion, implications, and future research focuses on how illegal practices are successfully marketed using seemingly legal means.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of online personals for escort services is situated at the intersection of mass communication, sociology, and law. Although stemming from vital topics associated with legality, promotion, and clearance procedures, questions about online personals have not triggered a great deal of research. To date, no systematic, comprehensive view on the advertising for controversial sex-related services exists. The overarching premise guiding this research is a paradox: how do illegal advertisements get marketed legally? The next section provides the regulatory context for sexual encounters, by defining legal and illegal sexual activities and clarifying distinctions between them.

Sexual Encounters

Criminalization of sex work, the heterogeneous nature of prostitutes and the wide range of contexts in which sex work occurs (Surratt, Kutz, Weaver, & Inciardi, 2005) complicate the situation surrounding definitions of sex work and its regulation. This section provides a brief overview of different types of sex work and their role in the sex industry. It focuses on personals posted by females in the escorts section of *Backpage.com*, including legal offers of massage and escort services as well as illegal offers of sex work disguised as an escort or a massage service.

Laying out a framework for establishing empirical generalizations on sex-related services and their promotion, Harcourt and Donovan (2005) distinguished 25 types of direct (which includes blatant sex soliciting) and indirect (which is represented by sex

solicitation disguised as another service) forms of sex work. They have emphasized street sex work, brothel prostitution, private prostitution, escort sex work, and prostitution in hotel and karaoke bars as the most prominent forms of sex work.

Historically, regardless of its legal status, street prostitution, that is, street solicitation and the provision of services in cars or side streets, has been one of the most common forms of prostitution in the United States (Law Office of Daniel Jensen, 2013). Brothel prostitution frequently occurs in the disguised form of massage parlors and saunas (Law Office of Daniel Jensen, 2013). The practice of owning a brothel and prostituting individuals is common in the United States, despite its criminalization (Tompkins, 2008). Private prostitution is represented by sex workers, working on their own premises and benefiting from online sex work promotion. Escort prostitution, which is the most covert form of sex work, requires clients to call to arrange a meeting. It should be noted that many escorts provide only non-sexual services and do not engage in sex work. However, the line between those escorts who engage in prostitution and those who do not is fluid: sometimes the choice to engage in sex work comes after a brief negotiation, even when initially a client has no desire to buy sex. Hence, sex-related advertisements with sexual innuendoes represent more direct solicitation than advertisements for sex work disguised as massage or non-sexual escort services. In addition to street or phone solicitation, various sex work catalogues and print and online classifieds promote sex-related opportunities. Escorts who post their personals online are more similar to private prostitutes than to street and brothel workers.

Studying the differences between types of sex workers, Gilderman (2012) found that escorts and private prostitutes are more educated than their street counterparts.

Escorts and private sex workers tend to work part-time or temporarily, exiting the sex industry at their discretion. Additionally, most escorts and private sex workers are less dependent on the money supplied by their trade, unlike sex workers on the streets who represent "a vulnerable, and increasingly forgotten, class of sex worker" (Gilderman, 2012).

Another category of sex worker is represented by hotel prostitutes, who typically approach unattached males in their hotel rooms. This type of sex work has been found to be "pervasive in the hotel industry at all levels" (Brinkmann, 2013). Yet another type of prostitution is represented by karaoke club and dance hall prostitutes working male clubs. In these situations, clients are usually offered special services, supplemented by drink specials and offers of other adult entertainment experiences. A less common category of sex work frequently occurs in crack houses, where clients receive sex in exchange for drugs (Donovan, 2005).

Despite its criminalization in most of the United States, sex work continues to have an "entrenched and visible presence" in the country (Hagner, 2009, p. 434). The differences in criminal penal laws of different states complicate the situation. For instance, the laws against buying sex in New York and Illinois are not enforced as consistently as those in Georgia and California. Patronizing a minor (i.e., pimping) is a crime in Illinois, but regulations avoid addressing this specific issue in California, Georgia, and New York (Hagner, 2009). Given the illegal status of the sex industry, the majority of the sex workers advertise services under the guise of escorts and massage therapists (Mccutcheon, 2013, p. 72).

Escort Services

Advertisements for sex-related services, escort and massage personals are prominently placed on the boards of online classifieds in the "escorts" and "body rubs" subsections of *Backpage* (2013), as well as in the "casual encounters" subsection of *Craigslist* (Craigslist, 2010-present). In promoting sex-related services, the common concerns of posters are what to emphasize to stand out in the increasingly cluttered setting, and how to market services in a constantly changing regulatory and social environment (Stevens, n.d.).

Escorts are more expensive than street walkers, due to the additional costs associated with working for an agency (if agency-based) or placing print or online advertisements (if independent) (Smith et al., 2013). In many cases, work of escort providers – both stated in the ad and implied – does not include sexual or sex-related services. The difference between an escort working for someone else and an independent escort is in the degree of agency or ability to make judgments and take action required when faced with a choice of providing a service: in comparison to independent escort providers, other escort providers rely on their company for advertising, introducing clients, and providing space for a meeting (Lucas, 2005). An escort services company is commonly perceived to provide escorts for specific occasions (e.g., business lunches, wedding receptions and parties). In general, the non-sexual services provided by most escorts may include but are not limited to: (1) providing a "girlfriend experience" or "GFE;"ⁱ (2) performing therapeutic massage; and (3) accompanying clients on professional meetings. Some escorts might be available for a more prolonged period of

time (e.g., business vacation). Any additional service, including sexual services, must be negotiated during the meeting directly with the escort herself.

When writing online personals for escort services, posters borrow heavily from advertising techniques used in both services and brand advertising. In order to disguise the sexual nature and hence the illegality of their services, sex workers sometimes label themselves as escorts. While some advertise their availability for dinners and dates, many are in fact "call girls;" their service is a front for "indoor" prostitution (Castle & Lee, 2008, p. 108). The subtlety of sex work advertising depends on the severity of punishment for sex-related activities enforced in a particular state. To avoid administrative and criminal punishment, typical ads published in the "escorts" subsection of the "adult" section on *Backpage* include no sexual innuendos or references to the price of the service:

Hey guys, I am looking for some fun, let's meet up! I come to party &
paint the town red.

No blocked calls please!

When promoting sex work under the disguise of escort services, posters use tactics of tensile pricing, frequently employing vernacular, such as: "donations," flowers, or "rose petals" to make references to money:

I'm looking for that special guy to have some fun. I'll be real sweet to you,
200 roses. NO SEX, and No Text, OUTCALL , INCALL.

To increase the perceived value of their services without mentioning prices, posters regardless of their legal status frequently refer to their ability to provide a "girlfriend experience" or companionship and emotional support (Hendrix, 2005; Lucas, 2005; Tewksbury & Gagne, 2002). GFE has become so popular that to get favorable reviews all escorts are routinely expected to provide "emotional support," which is frequently exemplified by conversation, affectionate touching, and massage (Hughes, 2003). From the perspective of clients who not only seek sex, but also appreciate having an emotional connection to the escort provider, the ideal GFE is a sex worker who truly acts as if she were not being paid for sex or some other sex-related activity. When referring to this kind of experience, Hughes (2003) found that some clients believe that women who offer GFE would do so solely for enjoyment.

Posters manage clients' price expectations by referring to client satisfaction. When referring to money, posters cautiously state that payment is received in exchange for "companionship." In addition, posters may provide a disclaimer notifying potential clients that anything that happens once a client meets an escort "happens between two consenting adults." Moreover, posters usually note that by contacting them, the client has to acknowledge that there is no "enforcement agency" involved. Additionally, some posters go so far as to mention "entrapment" in their anti-prostitution disclaimers.

I'm better than ur ex my time is no rush my body will have u pleased this is no exchange for s.e.x this is for our companionship on getting to no one another if u no wat I mean watevers done once we meet will be between two consecutive adults. By contacting me yu agree that ur not apart of any law enforcement agency or task force team thx I'm waiting to make ur day....

Posters then use a number of techniques; an anti-prostitution disclaimer is one of them, to distance themselves from potential legal violations for sex solicitation.

Massage Services

Similar to escorts, massage therapists advertise illicit inquiries and massage often "is treated as a sexual service." Sex workers disguising themselves as massage therapists contribute to the confusion regarding the nature of massage services. Bryant and Palmer (1975, pp. 229-231) offered a typology of massage parlors, distinguishing between:

- (1) genuine massage parlors (health clubs and establishments legitimate in their operation);
- (2) "rip-off" massage parlors, where the customer is lured by a seductive promise of having a sexual experience, but after coming to the parlor he is refused any sexual service;
- (3) brothels disguised as massage parlors, which offer a full menu of sexual services;
- (4) massage-and-masturbation only parlors (the most prevalent type includes masturbation service in the massage service).

Overall, massage therapists' reliance on a therapeutic image of their services marks the distinction between massage therapists and sex workers or escorts. A typical ad for a genuine massage therapist would be placed within the "body rubs" subsection of the "adult" section on *Backpage* and include references to the type of massage performed:

Massage and Spa Therapist...90 Minute, 2 Hour Sessions Available...Curvy & Fit...MASSAGE Practice: Therapeutic, deep tissue, Swedish, Couples Massage

Online personals posted within the "escorts" subsection of the "adult" section on *Backpage* include additional services, such as fetishes, dances, and more. These personals are usually placed within the classification for massage services outlined by Bryant and Palmer (1975) as "rip-off" massage parlors, brothels disguised as massage parlors, and massage-and-masturbation only parlors:

I Will Deliver a Most Memorable Grand Finale!

I am an All American Beauty w/Unmatched Enthusiasm & Skills-

My Visit Will Ensure You Have a Great Nights Sleep!

You Will Wake Up With a Smile from Ear to Ear!

Guaranteed Complete Erotic Pleasure & Amazing Massage!

Cute Asian Women are waiting for YOU!

Korean, Chinese, Japanese. Erotic Massage places are open now! Read my Reviews.

As evidenced in the examples provided, the promotion of legal and illegal sex-related services is an intricate dance. Online personals promoting escort services are complex phenomena, impossible to understand without looking at advertising, social justice, sociology, and law. Understanding definitional differences between various escort services and providers who are publishing the content will provide a basis for solving the paradox of illegal legality online, the situation in which sometimes illegal services get marketed with legal means. The next section will review studies on escort advertising. It will also speak about the content of online personals and the motivations of those who

post them, while taking into consideration legal and social risks involved in the buying and selling of sexual services. Social networks, specialized websites for escorts, and online classified sites will be discussed.

Marketing Sexual Encounters through Online Escort Personals

The Internet is a ubiquitous medium with global reach, its ability to propel any advertising campaign into the global spotlight is widely recognized. However, given its constantly evolving nature, questions arise about possible consequences of online advertising and opportunities to handle it more efficiently. One of the ways to deal with online media, while having a task of leveraging digital lives of advertising campaigns, is to test different message strategies. The other one is to control the content of campaigns, accounting for media self-imposed clearance policies. If the former is about efficiency, the latter is about legality.

Most studies conducted on the illegal sex-related activities (e.g., sex work disguised as escort or massage service) have avoided the content of the ads, focusing instead on the complicated relationships between the clients and the service providers. The search of literature discovered only 18 studies specifically looking at online personals. This section will draw empirical generalizations from the studies that have looked at (1) characteristics of clients that influence their choices of escorts, (2) motivations and advertising choices used by posters in online personals, (3) male escort advertising online, and (4) female escort advertising online. Of these studies, 11 studies analyzed the content of escort services advertising (male escorts = 8, female escorts = 3). The following sections will review principal studies.

Reflections on Clients of Internet Sexual Service Providers

The studies reviewed here provide keen insights into the reactions and behavior of clients. One of the studies used interviews with clients of escort services, whereas the others analyzed online reviews posted by them.

The fulfillment of sexual desires and a search for intimacy are among the main reasons why people check online personals. Online classifieds have a reputation of attracting seekers of "very specific sexual experiences – something you can't always count on from a one night stand that starts at a club or bar" (Axon, 2010). Pitts, Smith, Grierson, O'Brien, and Misson (2004) examined online reviews written by escort service clients, as a point of entree into the interactions between clients and escorts. Despite the fact that 44% of the escort clients in their study reported sexual relief as one of the common reasons they had decided to use escort services, the researchers concluded that the popularity of escorts is related to their ability to provide both sexual and non-sexual benefits.

Another analysis of online forum reviews submitted by clients of sex workers explored the nature of the intimacy developed in the escort service worker-client interaction. Mirod and Weitzer (2012) found that degree of intimacy ranged from "counterfeit intimacy to an authentic emotional bond between the two parties," the former representing a service "where the provider's expression of feelings is entirely manufactured" (p. 450) and the latter representing non-remunerative relationships. That intimacy is important is evident in the fact that the clients of both escorts and sex workers will choose a service that promises intimacy in favor of one that does not, all else being equal. Thus, the business success of workers engaged in the sex-related

services appears to depend on the provision/promise of intimate experiences, even for a short period of time.

In an early, pre-Internet study Holzman and Pines (1982) interviewed clients of sex workers or sex workers disguised as escorts to determine their motivations for buying sex. They found that the main motivations for calling an escort were mystery-seeking and excitement. However, in addition to satisfying these urges for sensation seeking, clients also sought reassurance and emotional pleasures alongside sexual satisfaction. Confirming the importance of the sexual element in their experience, almost all clients admitted that "the desire for sex was the bottom line of the intention to pay for sex" (Holzman & Pines, 1982, p. 103). These studies suggest that sex workers provide intangible experiences sometimes difficult to find in life. The promise of intimacy in escort personals influences clients' choice of escort services and the assessment of the quality of escort service experience.

One more study conducted by Milrod and Monto (2012) reaffirmed the importance of intimacy in the escort experience. They studied the characteristics, sexual preferences, attitudes, and motives of men ($n = 584$) who locate and contract female escorts for paid sex acts through a prostitute review site online. Calling themselves "hobbyists," these men solicit indoor prostitutes almost solely by using the Internet, the place where "in contrast to customers seeking prostitutes on the street, the risk of arrest is extremely low." The study concluded that men preferred the "girlfriend experience" or intimacy over all other personal qualities and behaviors.

To sum up, escort service workers help their clients attain intimate experiences, while satisfying their desires for mystery, sensation seeking, and reassurance. These

commonalities observed across abovementioned studies influence the client choices; they identify the complex stimuli that trigger the desires to go online in search of an escort.

Online Personals: Posters' Motivations and Choices of Advertising Strategies

The atmosphere surrounding adult entertainment postings in online classifieds in "escorts" and "casual encounters" sections is hyper-sexualized and charged with sexual expectations. This suggests the need to investigate motivations of individuals placing personals online (Roe-Sepowitz, 2012). One particular study examining motivations provides insight into the personalities of the posters, their needs, and personal involvement. Other studies examine their advertising strategies.

Parsons, Koken, and Bimbi (2001) addressed the psychological motivations for publishing escort personals among males. They interviewed 46 gay and bisexual male escorts who advertise online, and found that respondents' high sexual compulsivity was associated with high levels of sensation seeking and low self-confidence. At the same time, these factors were deemed to be important motivations for going online to publish either an announcement of non-sexual nature or an online personal offering sexual escort service. However, different motivations triggered different levels of involvement.

Two studies used content analysis to examine online advertising strategies used by posters. In exploratory analysis of the content of 76 escort websites located using online search engines Castle and Lee (2008) described a "typical" escort service personal. These ads consistently provided self-descriptions, including hair and eye color; body type and measurements; personality; demeanor; and short biographical sketches. Additionally, rates based on in-call/out-call, dates by the hour, and contact information were provided. Only half of the websites specified payment options; the other half relied upon implied

references rather than explicit pricing statements, i.e., tensile pricing, which helped posters avoid punishment for sex solicitation. Posters imply the unspecified price differences rhetorically, listing a number of "elite and exquisite" characteristics.

Groom and Pennebaker (2005) conducted a computerized analysis of 1,500 internet personal advertisements posted by heterosexual men and women, gay men and lesbians, examining language styles. Testing the assumption that "gender differences found in predominantly heterosexual samples are smaller or reversed among gay men and lesbians" (p. 447), they found that (1) men reported facts as a way of information exchange, whereas women relied on rapport with the potential reader, fostering connections; (2) men relied on facts, and women relied on emotions; and (3) men used indefinite social references, whereas women had "a more elaborated version of their ideal mate" (p. 458).

In an effort to identify human trafficking and forced prostitution victims, Roe-Sepowitz et al. (2012) analyzed 2,048 escort services personals published on *Backpage* throughout May 2012 in Phoenix ($n = 1145$) and Philadelphia ($n = 903$). Judgments about the legality of online personals were based on the use of techniques such as (a) self-censorship of photos, (b) posting sexually suggestive or nude photos, and (c) posting photos that feature under-age models (Roe-Sepowitz et al., 2012). This was the first research that made any attempt to systematically analyze the content of online personals.

Roe-Sepowitz et al. (2012) concluded that 78.6% ($n = 900$) of ads posted in Phoenix and 72% ($n = 903$) ads in Philadelphia were advertising prostitution. As a result of the study, 88 ads featuring providers under the age of 18 were reported to the police. Researchers also discovered that personals *soliciting* sex-related services outnumbered

personals *offering* them. Thus, the content analysis of online personals in all sections of classifieds revealed the demand for sex-related services had outgrown its supply. This finding immediately stirred concerns regarding the Internet as a place for illegal activities and confirmed existing social concerns about the legality of the escort personals online.

Personals of Male Escorts

Many studies emphasize gender differences in regard to how escorts post online personals (Lee-Gonyea, Castle, & Gonyea, 2009). Health is the major concern influencing differences in the layout and wording of personals posted by male and female escorts. A search of the literature identified a total of eight studies looking at the content of ads posted by males. Several of these studies grew out of questions related to HIV among the gay population. Three studies focused entirely on HIV (Parsons et al., 2007; Voon Chini, Ciambrone, & Vazque, 2009; Minichiello, Scott, & Callander, 2013).

Reflecting biological differences and health hazards related to unprotected male-to-male sexual intercourse, personals posted by male escorts use a lexicon that differs from that of females, usually listing the sex acts and indicating penis size (Pruitt, 2005; Blackwell, 2013). Additionally, male escorts emphasize issues of safe sex more often than female escorts. The female personals pay considerable attention to the age of the posters; male escorts favor the issues of health claims instead. Another finding relates to sexual orientation and differences in male and female posters stating their own and clients' sexual desires. The majority of male escorts are either homosexual or bisexual (Parsons et al., 2007; Blackwell, 2013), whereas the majority of female escorts are heterosexual.

Two final studies on specialized websites examined the content of male escort personals; however, neither provided adequate data on inter-coder reliability, calling into question the reliability of the results. Blackwell and Dziegielewski (2012) conducted a study on sexual solicitation in online personals of male sex workers. They collected and analyzed the data from individual profiles ($n = 163$) published on a website utilized by male sex workers in the United States. According to their data, most of the men who published their profiles were between the ages of 18 and 30 and defined themselves as bisexual (43%). The study found that the mean age of street workers was 28 years, while the mean age of those who used the Internet to meet clients was older (42.6 years). The majority of the profiles assessed in this study indicated engagement in safe-sex behavior with clients (90%).

In a study of online prostitution, as an emerging form of prostitution, Lee-Gonyea et al. (2009) content analyzed ads from 83 websites advertising male escort agencies or individual-independent male escort services. The study found that websites made no distinction between advertising for a date and an escort service. Some targeted either men or women, while the majority of online personals in their sample targeted both men and women. This study evoked questions regarding gender differences associated with graphic representations in online personals, finding that websites "for the females tended to be less graphic and explicit in nature" (p. 342).

Personals of Female Escorts

Contrary to the popular belief that sex work research is rich with studies of female sex workers (Lee-Gonyea et al., 2009; Weitzer, 2009), it would not be an exaggeration to say that the content of female personals online has remained virtually unexplored; only two studies were identified.

Pruitt and Krull (2011) conducted a content analysis of the advertisements of 237 female Internet escorts advertising on a large U.S. website. They found that 79% of the ads mentioned price. They also found that women posters generally were more likely to report characteristics associated with their appearance than their personality. Among the top physical attributes indicated by escorts ($n = 237$) in the ads were: beauty (60.3%), and chest, waist, and hip stats (89.9%). Between 56-64% of women provided "discernable face shots of themselves in their advertisements" (p. 51).

Findings related to appearance of escorts and promotion, however, are highly contested. For example, all clients in a study conducted by Holzman and Pines (1982) indicated that they "were likely to rate a practitioner as physically acceptable if she possessed a "moderate" or "average" degree of attractiveness. Other researchers found that physical attractiveness of escorts did not play a significant role and was not pursued by their clients. The clients were satisfied with particular characteristics of the escorts and sought those specifically (Hendrix, 2005). Apart from beauty, Pruitt and Krull (2011) discovered that offerings of girlfriend experience (20.3%), "unrushed" encounters (12.7%), and discretion (13.1%) were more common than offerings of sex acts. It should be noted that kissing was offered as a part of GFE in 2% of ads.

While not exploring online personals per se, Hall et al. (2012) examined female self-sexualization in *MySpace* profiles. *MySpace* profiles serve a different purpose than online personals, however, because posters on *MySpace*, *Backpage*, and *Craigslist* are looking for various encounters, including sex-related and romantic encounters, the findings regarding *MySpace* possess value for this study.

A total of 24,000 *MySpace.com* profile photographs across four age categories with 6,000 photographs for each category, were analyzed. The study operationalized self-sexualization using concepts such as subordination, body display, and objectification.

The study found that body display was the most common form of self-sexualized behavior, occurring in almost 20% of the studied photographs. Only 1.3% of posters were portrayed as nude and wearing swimwear. Ritualization of subordination, including models portrayed in submissive poses, was the second most common form of self-sexualization (17%). Comparing the profiles across age categories, the study found that college and post-graduate women "had significantly higher rates of body display and objectification" than any other age group (Hall et al., 2009, p. 13). Black women had significantly higher rates of body display and objectification than Caucasian women (Hall et al., 2009, p. 11).

These findings coming from different studies on the content of online personals are compatible with previous research on advertising that relies on explicit visuals and implicit language more than on logical statements and explanations. It has already been established that in order to guide prospective customers of controversial services, online personals rely more often on the peripheral route to persuasion than on the central route, as these routes are outlined by Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann (1983).

Having discussed the content of personals and how different providers construct that content using different media platforms provides an opportunity to look closer at the legality of the personals published online. Questions of legality of personals as promotional vehicles for escort services cannot be viewed apart from the environment surrounding the sex-related services, both legal and illegal. Hence, the next section will elaborate on the regulations for sex work and sex-related activities, including history of regulations associated with sex work on the streets and in media. It will also include a brief outline of historical capstones in the development of regulations regarding sex-related services and their promotion. The sex industry's rules for the promotion of legal establishments (e.g., massage parlors and escorts offering non-sexual services) will be compared to the practices of sex solicitation found in illegal establishments (e.g., massage parlors and escorts offering sexual experiences).

Regulations on Promotion of Sexual Encounters

The same brothel in Nevada could cost an owner a \$200 fee in Lander County, a \$150,000 fee in Nye County, and up to 6 months in jail and/or \$1,000 fine in Las Vegas.

(ProCon.org, 2009)

Technological advances have been instrumental in gradually moving sexual activities from the streets (Lee-Gonyea et al., 2009). Promotion for sex-related services in the United States increased with the appearance of railroads and trucks, then with invention of the telephone and pagers, and, finally, with the advent of print and online media. The role of technology in the development of marketing tactics regarding the

promotion of sex-related services, no matter their legality, also has been a vital one throughout the history of the United States.

The public's attitude toward sex work reflects changes in the legality of the promotion of sex-related services. The debate regulating prostitution began with the Mann Act (1910), a federal law against "prostitution or debauchery, or ... any other immoral purpose" aimed at fighting human trafficking of Caucasian women. In 1912, a group of community leaders in New York wrote *the Social Evil* (Seligman, 1912), a report that emphasized sanitary and moral necessity of regulating sex work and stated the need for "social action against the vice" (p. 59), the protection of children, and the restoration of fallen women to honorable life (p. 63). The discussion surrounding prostitution ran high: "no less than 156 entries related to prostitution appeared in *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature* for the five years between 1910 and 1914" (ProCon.org, 2009). Apart from the federal law, the illegal status of sex work arose in New Orleans brothels. In 1917, the brothels were closed due to concerns over health hazards to U.S. marines.

The status of sex work remained unchanged for thirty years. In the 1940s, the government recognized that some of its anti-prostitution punishments were excessive. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Mortensen et ux v. United States* case (1944) that prostitutes could travel across state lines without violating the Mann Act, if "[t]he sole purpose of the journey from beginning to end was to provide innocent recreation and a holiday for petitioners and the ... girls" (*Mortensen et ux v. United States*, 1944).

The state of Nevada allowed its rural counties to license brothels (NRS201.354) and brothel workers (NRS244.345) in 1971, beginning the decriminalization of sex work.

Since that time, in those counties of Nevada where prostitution is legal, the law requires sex workers to use a condom, and undergo weekly tests for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and monthly tests for HIV. Additionally, both brothel owners and prostitutes are required to pass a background check (NRS244.345). These multiple regulations, however, have not been specific/clear enough to include all possible violations or questionable situations.

Anti-sex work regulations are constantly updated, due to ambiguous legal language and exploitation of loopholes. For instance, to close a loophole, legislators added a proposition against pimping of minors to the Mann Act in 1978, and then prohibiting child pornography in 1986. An example of regulatory confusion occurred in the state of Rhode Island, where due to exploitation of the loopholes in regulations, indoor prostitution was legal from 1980 until November 3, 2009 (Donnis, 2009).

According to the U.S. penal codes, sex solicitation as the offering of compensation for sex, prohibited by law in the United States. Specifically sex solicitation refers to the "instances of any prosecution for prostitution or patronizing a prostitute, the sex of the two parties or prospective parties to the sexual conduct engaged in, contemplated or solicited is immaterial," and it is no defense that:

1. Such persons were of the same sex; or
2. The person who received, agreed to receive or solicited a fee was a male and the person who paid or agreed or offered to pay such fee was a female

(NY Penal Code, Art. 230, S. 230.10 Prostitution and patronizing a prostitute; no defense).

The purpose of anti-sex work regulations is to prevent any sex-work-related activities, whereas the purpose of sex work regulations where sex work is legal is to control the sex industry. Paradoxically, sometimes legalization of sex work practices does not benefit sex workers as much as their illegal existence. For instance, today, those 11 counties in Nevada where sex work is legal have just under 30 brothels and employ approximately 500 women as "legal independent contractors." When asked, 84% of these women were confident about their job security and safety (Brents, 2012). However, despite many advantages of legalized sex work, such as job safety and health care, even in the counties where sex work is legal, it is unregulated:

The criminalisation of sex work involves the implementation of laws regulating prostitution-related activities as a means to control the more 'offensive' aspects of sex work, such as, soliciting/loitering in a public place for the purpose of prostitution (Pérez-y-Pérez, 2003, p. 41).

The situation surrounding sex-related service advertising is complicated. Sex workers benefit from advertising freedom in promoting their services in counties where sex work is legal, but not in counties where it is illegal (NRS201.440, NRS201.430). For instance, a legal brothel functioning in Nye county Nevada cannot advertise in Las Vegas outlets, whereas an illegal brothel disguised as a massage parlor can. As a result, anti-advertising laws regarding sex work serve to foster illegal prostitution and its disguised advertising. Thus, sex workers are "forced" to either develop new promotional techniques or to go back to the old strategies that disguise their status as sex workers.

The legality of promoting sex-related services correlates with the legal status of sex work in a given state. Clients are increasingly cautious due to restrictions on promotion of sex-related services and punitive actions regarding sex solicitation. However, because boundaries between providers of sex work and providers of non-sexual services are unclear; clients of sex workers tend to be cautious when accepting non-verbal, verbal, and leaflet-like invitations to engage in some sex-related activity.

The history of prostitution includes some extraordinary cases. Because of its proximity to Nevada counties where sex work is legal, the city of Las Vegas deserves special attention. Las Vegas streets are full of hotels and bars providing all-night entertainment for rich and poor alike. "The going rate for a prostitute was...\$2 a night" in the 1900s, something which is still possible today. Allegedly, that is why the United States government decided to stop issuing \$2 dollar bills (Greenspan, 2010). Las Vegas is perceived as a place to have fun and possibly, to encounter "gold diggers" who want to have fun and look for someone to pay for their drinks (Las Vegas Direct, 2013).

Nationwide, in 2008, the median cost of a street prostitute for sexual intercourse was \$30 compared with \$200 for an escort (Castle & Lee, 2008). Today, the one-hour price for a sex worker ranges from \$300 in Shady Lady brothel, a brothel catering to "average working men" (Giang, 2011) to "\$2500" and "middle 5 figures" at the Moonlite Bunny Ranch (Sex in Nevada, 2012). In her Moonlite Bunny Ranch days, Moonlite Bunny Ranch prostitute Brook Taylor was charging as much as \$100,000 for a five-day party (Robb, 2008).

The back pages of alternative newspapers and advertising online offer numerous opportunities for workers of sex-related services to tout their competencies and justify

their price. The price for a sex worker depends on "the beauty of a girl, time involved, kinks employed, presence of girlfriend experience," and the negotiation abilities of both parties involved (Sex in Nevada, 2012). According to one of the members of *C. W.*

Monger's Message Board who was speaking about her work at the Love Ranch North:

There are clients who spend in the hundreds and clients who spend in the thousands. The experiences will differ, but it's all about what you are looking for, what the lady is looking for, and where you can meet in the middle.

(C.W. Monger's Message Board, n.d.)

Although sex work is illegal in Reno, Carson City, and the "iconic city of commodified sex, Las Vegas," up to 3,500 illegal prostitutes work in the Las Vegas underground sex industry at any given time (Hausbeck, Brents, & Jackson, 2006, p. 429).

These illegal workers invent tactics, which include, but are not limited to sex workers...

(1) creating "highly informal and discreet systems...of lists of preferred upscale prostitutes who can be made quickly available to the wealthiest guests" of the upscale hotels with the help of hotel concierges (Brents, 2007)

(2) cooperating with legal out-call entertainment businesses and call centers "that dispatch nude dancers to hotel rooms for an agency fee, and dancers may provide sexual services illegally for tips" (Brents, 2007)

(3) collaborating with out-call agencies to advertise services on billboards and handbills, stands containing flyers and through individuals giving promotional leaflets to tourists on the sidewalks (Hausbeck et al., 2006)

(4) splitting their earnings with taxi drivers 70 to 30, if customers take a taxi to get to the sex worker's place (Giang, 2011)

- (5) distributing promotional leaflets near the rest areas for truck drivers
- (6) avoiding casino security by visiting bars discreetly

Attempts to declare anti-sex solicitation laws unconstitutional have been unsuccessful (Scheid, 2011); the constitutionality of the ban was confirmed by the U.S. Supreme Court (*Coyote Publ'g, Inc. v. Masto*, 2011). As a result, legal brothels have sought other promotional strategies to attract customers. Brothel group tours invite potential customers to see sex work and experience sexual gratifications. The tourists who frequent these tours are "as diverse as Elderhostel and the Red Hat Society (organizations for retired citizens), university classes, and Asian tourists on outings from Las Vegas" (Hausbeck & Brents, 2002, p. 433).

Today little has changed beyond differences in how sex is promoted: unlike those who sought sex encounters centuries ago on the streets or in classifieds, those seeking encounters today do so online. In the early 1970s, the last pages of alternative newspapers were the common medium for selling sex. Today, the World Wide Web provides a more nuanced, accessible, widespread, and common method of selling and buying sex.

All media follow regulatory as well as self-regulatory policies regarding advertising. The next section will elaborate on the nature and effectiveness of these policies regarding the advertising industry in general and escort services advertising online in particular. The questions of legality of the personals could be addressed by looking at the correspondence of their content to penal codes; however, to understand the content of online personals in the media context, a look at the clearance compliance policies is necessary. Given the long-lasting tensions between regulations and self-regulations in the United States and their impact on media, an exploration of the

historical underpinnings for clearance practices in media is necessary. By putting online personals in the larger context of the regulatory and self-regulatory mix, this section will provide description for the main players involved when it comes to the promotion of online personals.

Regulatory Mix for Advertising of Controversial Services

Beyond concerns about social responsibility, advertising often becomes the scapegoat for concern over controversial services. The goal of the regulatory and self-regulatory practices is prevention of critics' attacks by fostering responsible advertising. Boddewyn observed that these practices are formed by the government (state), self-regulation (private-interest government), media (market), and consumer activism (community). Elaborating on this self-regulatory mix, Boddewyn (1985, p. 135) identified six types of advertising controls and their characteristics; self-discipline, pure self-regulation, co-opted self-regulation, negotiated self-regulation, mandated self-regulation, and pure regulation.

Self-discipline. Companies practicing self-discipline, develop, use, and enforce norms, while internally negotiating issues most important to their stakeholders. The company takes into consideration issues of public taste and the legality of advertising, (Zanot, 1985; Boddewyn, 1989). This clearance process involves reviews by lawyers, the advertiser, the advertising agency, and the media (Zanot, 1985, p. 51). Each of the initial reviews is repeated during the final clearance stage. The entire clearance process then is comprised of multiple checks to determine whether the advertisements in question are compliant with existing codes and laws, whether claims are substantiated, whether

advertising is false or misleading, and, finally, whether advertising was modified if required by the previous checks (Xuemei et al., 2011).

As a result of government deregulation of broadcasting industry, the punitive consequences of comparative advertising (Beard & Nye, 2010) and "the enlightened self-interest of avoiding subsequent regulatory action or suit by competitors" concerns over comparative advertising controls arose in many companies (Zanot, 1985, p. 47). Hence, many media implemented legal clearance departments that established self-censorship practices, especially in regard to publication of advertisements for sex-related services.

Pure self-regulation is represented by companies developing norms which are enforced by the organizations that oversee their work. It revolves around the development, usage, and enforcement of norms by "the *industry* itself" (Boddewyn, 1985, p. 135). The goal of these self-regulatory practices is to determine if ads abide by established policies outlined within the Advertising Industry's Process of Voluntary Self-Regulation, established by the Advertising Self-Regulatory Council (ASRC). The ASRC also establishes the policies for the Children's Advertising Review Unit (CARU) and the Electronic Retailing Self-Regulation Program (ERSP). Three more organizations overseeing ASR practices are National Advertising Division (NAD), National Advertising Review Board (NARB), and Online Interest-Based Advertising Accountability Program (OIBAAP). NAD is concerned with the review of national advertising for truthfulness and accuracy; ⁱⁱ NARB handles appeals for ad industry's self-regulation; OIBAAP is the newest organization concerned with behavioral advertising across the Internet.

In the case of *co-opted self-regulation* the advertising industry voluntarily involves "non-industry people (e.g., consumer and government representatives, independent members of the public, experts) in the development, application, and enforcement of norms" (Boddewyn, 1985, p. 135). With help of these people, the companies institute self-regulatory practices for determining acceptability of the ads and for reviewing every advertisement (Abernethy, 1993; Rotfeld, Abernethy, & Parsons, 1990).

Negotiated self-regulation is represented by the industry voluntarily negotiating the development, use, and enforcement of norms with some outside body. Because *Backpage* has the escorts section for sex-related services, as a representative of this industry it decided to collaborate with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and the National Human Trafficking Resource Center to prevent human trafficking.

Mandated self-regulation is represented by the industry that is ordered or designated by the government to develop, use and enforce norms. For example, *Craigslist* decided to close its adult services section due to the pressure from the government.

In pure regulation, the government (state) develops, applies, and enforces the norms. For example, the FTC has regulatory authority over all types of consumer advertising, including alcohol and tobacco ads, as well as online advertising (FTC, 2013). At the same time, the FCC deals with consumers' complaints about the nature of the products advertised, the timing of certain ads and their poor taste (FCC, 2013).

The media industry primarily relies on processes of self-regulation and self-discipline, which constitute the core of the clearance process by "which media vehicles

decide what advertising will be published or broadcast" (Rotfeld, 1992, p. 87). Clearance practices developed by national and local media companies, become the most common defense against ad critics, while also protecting consumers.

Regulation and self-regulation of escort services promotion are complicated by the fact that sex work is a crime in most U.S. states. Hence, posting sex work ads is illegal. Personals concealing sex work as massage or non-sexual escort services make judgments about enforcement of anti-prostitution regulations difficult. As previously mentioned, in many large cities throughout the United States massage parlors have long been seen as "delivery rooms for sexual services" advertised in the *Yellow Pages* (Bryant & Palmer, 1975, p. 228). Some of today's announcements for massage services could be seen as "thinly veiled ads for sex workers" posted in both escort and massage-service sections of *Yellow Pages* and alternative newspapers (Lee, 2008).

Advertising self-regulatory practices have been addressed by only a handful of scholars thus far. The interplay between advertising content and media self-regulatory practices first became a topic of research when media companies began developing self-regulatory policies addressing the issues of false and deceptive advertising.

Adding to the traditional issues addressed by regulatory practices, such as handling complaints and ensuring pre- or post-monitoring of compliance with norms, the advertising industry faces new problems today. As Lee Peeler, President and CEO of ASRCⁱⁱⁱ notes, despite establishing "an extraordinary record of delivering *real* self-regulatory programs that address the needs of both ethical competitors and consumers... the challenge for self-regulation is going digital" (Urbach, 2013).

Due to the highly contested and controversial nature of sex-related services, until the emergence of the Internet, clandestine classifieds and alternative newspapers were almost the only media used for the promotion of those services (Whalen, 2012). The Internet not only changed the possibilities of advertising, but also broadened business possibilities for sex-related services. Today, *Craigslist* and *Backpage* use mechanisms of negotiated self-regulation to police the promotion of sex-related services; phone numbers for a human trafficking hotline are indicated in the *Terms of Use* on the site. As a result of public and government inquiries, self-regulatory mechanisms have been quickly changing over the last decade, culminating in several law suits over immunity for user-generated content^{iv} in the promotion of escort services advertisements (Goldman, 2012).

In Regulatory Crossfire: Online Media and Sexual Encounters

The regulation of the promotion of sex-related services in online media is a conundrum for regulatory organizations. The regulatory policies of national advertising are developed by government (state) and non-compliance with their policies results in punitive actions. The compliance with decisions of self-regulatory organizations is non-binding. At the most, the failure to comply could result in the referral of the matter to a government agency.

Escort services advertising is subject to both regulatory and self-regulatory procedures instituted by the government and media. The anti-pornography regulations routinely applied to escort personals have been developed by the U.S. Congress and instituted through the Communication Decency Act of 1996 (Section 230). The anti-human trafficking policies are initiated by *Backpage* and instituted through self-imposed media clearance policies.

Due to the interactive nature of the Internet and global reach, the media have been granted immunity in publishing content online; the immunity relieves the media of liability for any user-generated content unless the content of the advertisement breaches privacy, or intellectual property, or is a subject to federal law (Communication Decency Act, 1996). This provision of the Communication Decency Act (CDA) helped revolutionize the online promotion of controversial sex-related services across the United States, exploiting new, intangible, CDA-protected, Internet-based means of communication.

The role of technology and the Internet has been vital, spreading new ways of socializing and networking, buying services, and ensuring the ability of posters to market sex and make money. The role of technology and the Internet is vital in spreading new ways of socializing and networking, buying services, and marketing sex. Technology provides users, both clients of sex-related services and providers, with a discrete, immediate, and easy-to-use environment. This ensures their ability to make more money, while engaging in safer sexual practices and limiting concerns over detection by law enforcement (Parsons et al., 2004). Today the majority of advertising for escort services is online. Controversies that followed the popularity of the online classified sites stimulated their owners to adopt self-disciplined approach to advertising controls. Faced with allegations of human trafficking and prostitution, online classified sites have transformed their models of advertising through establishing clearance policies that prohibit posters from publishing illegal content. These transformations can be traced by looking at the cases of online personals at *Craigslist* and *Backpage*.

En Route toward New Self-Regulatory Mechanisms: The Case of Craigslist

With the arrival of *Craigslist*, an online classified site enabling the public to sell and buy various things and services online, the Internet eliminated barriers to entering prostitution (Cunningham & Kendall, 2011). Hausbeck and Brents (2002, p. 432) indicate that individual sex workers and some brothels near tourist cities have drastically changed their promotion strategies by going online. The rise of online personals on *Craigslist* and other online classified sites gave sex workers a possibility of reaching broader audiences, while getting around anti-prostitution restrictions on advertising. Prostitutes published their ads within the "erotic services" section of online classified sites (Hawkins, 2013) to disguise the nature of their services.

The success of promotional practices associated with sexual services online in the late 2000s resulted in allegations against *Craigslist*, claiming that it fostered "prostitution and other illegal activities." *Craigslist* won the lawsuit (Carr, 2011), claiming that it should not be held responsible for third party ads (based on the Section 230 of CDA). Despite that victory, as a result of public pressure in 2009, *Craigslist* relabeled its "erotic services" section as the "adult services" section, indicating that its announcements would be subject to review (Stone, 2009). In such a way, the medium subscribed to regulatory self-discipline. However, the public remained adamant about closure of the "adult" section (Carr, 2011). By 2010, *Craigslist* had become one of the major promotional spaces for adult personals, generating more than \$36 million in revenues from online personals. Under pressure coming from critics, *Craigslist* rebranded its "adult" services section as a "censored" section. That section was closed down in 2010, honoring the

requests of 17 U.S. state attorneys general concerned about *Craigslist* as a tool for crime proliferation (CNN Wire Staff, 2010).

After *Craigslist's* closure of the "censored" section, *Backpage* replaced *Craigslist* as a major space for classifieds in the United States. The revenues of *Backpage.com* for escort service ads increased by 15.3% in between August and September 2011 (AIM Group, 2010). As of 2013, both *Backpage* and *Craigslist* allow posters to publish announcements for sexual services. The former does so within subsections of the "adult" section, and the latter does so within subsections of its "personals" section (see Table 2.1). Both online classifieds continue to face media scrutiny and public disapproval.

Following the example of *Craigslist*, similar online classifieds have upgraded their policies toward control of advertising content. However, despite tightened clearance policies, pages of online ads remain full of personals offering sex implicitly (Gustafson, 2009). For instance, the majority of the ads placed within the "casual encounters" section of *Craigslist* advertise opportunities for one-night stands. Gustafson (2009, para. 6) points out "[p]retty much everyone in the personal ads section is looking for one thing...sex. Many times, paid sex."

In sum, even though the request of 17 U.S. attorneys general did not result in a law ordering *Craigslist* to develop, use, and enforce norms (CNN Wire Staff, 2010), this request may have foretold a new era of self-regulation. The U.S. attorneys general stimulated both the development of more stringent self-disciplinary policies by some online classifieds and the adoption of negotiated self-regulation policies by others (e.g., *Backpage*).

From Pure Self-Discipline to Negotiated Self-Regulation: The Case of Backpage

Before the *Craigslist* controversy, *Backpage* also relied on the approach of self-discipline toward the advertising content. Today, *Backpage* subscribes to the approach of negotiated self-regulation. Speaking on behalf of the sex-related services industry, *Backpage* voluntarily negotiated the development, use, and enforcement of norms with two outside organizations: the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (Polaris Project) and the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC). By collaborating with these organizations, *Backpage* provides all prospective posters of online personals with an opportunity to call 24-hour hotlines to "report the suspected sexual exploitation of minors and/or human trafficking" (see Table 2.2).

Before seeing any notices about clearance compliance, posters would click on the link of the escort section of *Backpage*. Like *Craigslist*, *Backpage* prevents posters not only from publishing, but also from seeing any content published within the "escorts" section until they read and agree to the disclaimer. The disclaimer specifically requires them to "confirm" that they are "18 years of age or older," and that by "accessing this website" they realize this particular section "contains sexual content, including pictorial nudity and adult language." Below the disclaimer *Backpage* links to its *Terms of Use*, in which clearance policies regarding the content of the online personals are outlined.

After agreeing to the disclaimer and accepting *Terms of Use* (which is possible even without hitting the button that leads to *Terms of Use*) the poster is able to view all escort announcements published on the site and has an opportunity to write an ad, following the provided instructions (see Appendix A).

Backpage allows posters to self-censor controversial content. The first step of writing an ad warns posters to avoid posting any questionable content or risk removal of their ads without a refund (see these requirements in Table 2.2, Table 2.3). In the next step of reviewing the ad, posters check if they transgressed any clearance policies of the media by comparing their ad with the notice about clearance requirements stated at the top of their ad (see Table 2.3). Thus, prior to changes made in 2012, posters saw the notice about clearance requirements twice before submitting an ad. After that, posters would submit a post, double check the link to it, and receive a confirmation email about its successful posting.

In September 2012, *Backpage* made changes to the posting process and clearance compliance policies. The media removed the notice about clearance requirements. As a result, posters could proceed to publishing their ads right after they saw the general review of clearance policies (see Table 2.2 and Table 2.3).

In general, all clearance policies were instituted by *Backpage* in collaboration with U.S. and international anti-human trafficking organizations to prevent dissemination of information about potentially illegal actions/services (e.g., sex solicitation, sex work). To illustrate how references to sex work could be used to promote illegal sex-related services, Pruitt and Krull (2011, p. 59) emphasize:

...Both clients and prostitutes use standard argot for terms associated with prostitution, and this is evidenced in these advertisements. For example, we find some coded references to speaking or being fluent in “Greek” (anal sex) and “French” (oral sex) as well as more common slang such as “BJ” for blowjobs and perhaps less common “bbbj” for bareback (without condoms) blowjobs.

Continuing the tradition of negotiated self-regulation, *Backpage* has experimented with clearance compliance notices and with the requirements for posting. Not having any clearance model to follow, *Backpage* has attempted to communicate to the public that it cares about the well-being of those who post online personals and those who work legally. By implementing these steps of negotiated self-regulation, *Backpage* protects itself not only with the help of CDA, but also anti-human trafficking efforts. Nevertheless, policies aimed at controlling advertising content online are abundant, however, they rarely correspond. Their lack of agreement leaves a void in sustaining the climate of responsible advertising. This void is especially evident in the case of escort personals, which are regulated by clearance policies of *Backpage* online and by the U.S. penal codes.

Existing in different regulatory planes, self-regulators (i.e., those developing media clearance policies) and regulators often undermine each other's efforts. Media, consumers, and public policy makers tend to hearken back to negative outcry regarding *Craigslist*, failing to study the effectiveness of advertising policies in the cases of self-discipline (e.g., *Craigslist*) and negotiated self-regulation (e.g., *Backpage*). As a result, all content of online personals is criticized for its inappropriateness and illegality. The conundrum persists.

The overview provided by the next section will elaborate how sex-related services and their promotion fit within the framework of services advertising.

Advertisements for Controversial Services

Economically, services account for roughly 80 percent of the U.S. gross domestic product. The majority of the current list of Fortune 500 is service-driven companies

(CNNMoney, 2013). A service-driven economy is constituted by institutions as diverse as financial services, health care, retail, and tourism but can also include services of the shadow economy as well (e.g., sex-related services). Escort services are controversial services that Farley (2005, p. 952) claims should not be sold, because "[e]scort prostitution simply means that an ad is placed online or in a newspaper, that she or her pimp has a cell phone, and that there is access to a home or hotel room or car." Given social, moral, and legal concerns related to escort services advertising, a general understanding of their nature is limited and so an understanding of the nature of related services. One possible explanation for this dearth of understanding is the lack of research on services advertising, which includes company's expenditures on advertising that explicitly promotes services, putting the brand or the image of the company aside (Prins & Verhoef, 2007, pp. 174-175).

Fisk, Brown, and Bitner (1993) divided research on services advertising into three distinct periods based on frequency of publication in major journals. The first period, identified as the "crawling out" phase (1953-1980), was characterized by tangential research on services arising out of related topics. The initial studies sought to investigate the differences between product and services advertising as well as the differences within services advertising itself (e.g., business-to-business services vs. consumer services) (Turley & Kelley, 1997). After the deregulation of the broadcasting industry, which began in the 1970s (Tripp, 1997), many companies demanded more research on comparative services advertising because of the increased risks of being sued over misleading ads (Hancock, 2011). After all, while allowing companies to institute self-regulatory procedures regarding the promotion of their products and services,

deregulation procedures also provided many opportunities for all companies to blame their opponents for running hurtful comparative ads.

As a result of increased concern, research on services advertising culminated in what Fisk et al. (1993) identified as a period of "scurrying about" (1980-1985). Studies on services that appearing during this time asked the same research questions that were typically used in studies on product advertising. Research on services advertisements flourished. Beginning in 1986, services advertising research entered the "walking erect" phase (1986-present) during which studies recognized the differences between services and branded goods advertising.

Turley and Kelley (1997) identified particular characteristics that distinguish services advertising from that of branded goods – intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability, and perishability. Their findings stimulated further interest in the area. Looking for differences *within* services advertising rather than differences *between* advertising for services and branded goods, Albers-Miller and Stafford (1999) focused on two very different services – financial and travel. Financial services, which they identified as utilitarian, are based on rationale. Experiential services like travel above all else are socially oriented, related to emotional consumption. Experiential services were characterized as having "higher levels of employee contact and customization directed toward people, as opposed to things, and have a strong people orientation." Utilitarian services have "lower degrees of employee contact and customization," and are more "equipment and object-oriented" (Albers-Miller & Stafford, 1999, p. 393). The intangibility of services posed distinctive ethical challenges associated with the development of socially appropriate advertising strategies (Stafford, 2011).

These findings emphasized the need to recognize both tangible and intangible aspects of services.

Escort services, like travel, might be identified as experiential service. Relying on intangibility (emotion) rather than calculated interest and rationality, they adopt a special strategy of pricing, that attracts a client's interest without providing an actual price, i.e., tensile pricing. Exploring the mechanics and effectiveness of pricing strategies for services, Mobley, Bearden, and Teel (1988) coined the term tensile pricing to refer to intentionally vague tactics of promotion. Due to issues of legality, tensile pricing is advantageous in promoting sex-related services, providing a consumer with "an idea of a discount range or possibility, rather than a specific discount figure" (Stafford & Stafford, 2000). For example, substituting roses for money in online personals is a frequent practice of tensile pricing used by some providers.

Until late 1990s, research on services advertising primarily revolved around the 7Ps – product, promotion, price, place, packaging, positioning, and people – a concept borrowed from branded goods advertising. Adapting Rusbult's work on consumer responses, Stern (1997) recognized that the bond created between services and their target audiences as a result of advertising was not captured in the 7Ps model. She suggested that research on services advertising would be enhanced by adding the concept of intimacy, which she viewed as one of the main features at the core of services. She introduced the 5C model, consisting of five attributes related to intimacy: communication, commitment, care, conflict resolution, and comfort. Additionally, Stern (1997) developed a four-stage model of intimate relationships – acquaintance, build-up, continuation, and dissolution.

Brents and Hausbeck (2007) link tourism and escort services as services that are "increasingly selling individualized interactive touristic experiences." Tourist experiences revolve around the notion of "limited intimacy," which includes business relationships between people. By contrast, escort services experiences, such as a "girlfriend experience" or GFE,^v might revolve around the notion of "full intimacy" (Stern, 1997) which is comprised of higher levels of empathy and personal attention than "limited intimacy."

In another series of studies, Stern (1997) explored intimacy in the context of nonverbal communication. Applying her findings to escort services, sympathetic or responsive listening might play a principal part in clients' experiences. Reflecting this reasoning, many escorts emphasize their skills in providing care through "limited" intimacy, in which the clients have opportunities to share their thoughts with the escort provider who shows "nonjudgmental sympathy, often communicated by silence" (Stern, 1997). Additionally, escorts provide the illusion of "unrushed" service. In another study on health-related services, Stern (2011) also emphasized the importance of "limited intimacy." She concluded that promises of "limited" intimacy and discretion along with tensile pricing strategies within the ads comprise the core of services advertising in general and health services advertising in particular.

Arnould and Price (1993, p. 28) identified rafting, the extreme sport/activity of using an inflatable raft to navigate a river, as an "extraordinary service experience...inherently interpretive, subjective, and affective." Escort services might also be looked at as extraordinary service experience. Their work, when viewed in the context of earlier work on rationality and emotion (Albers-Miller & Stafford, 1999) suggests that

differences within the escort services are important to understanding escort services advertising. Clients seek additional information before venturing to purchase any service offered by a sex worker or an escort provider, primarily because of possible legal risks involved. Because an escort's task is to care about the emotional state of the client, the degree of intimacy between an escort and her client is greater than that of a sex worker and her client (Milrod & Monto, 2012). A sex worker's task is focused on satisfying the physical desires of the client, whereas a task of an escort service provider, apart from that, may entail additional responsibilities and skills, which sometimes take a long time to develop.

Research suggests that escort services advertising might be something of a hybrid of branded goods and services advertising. Similar to branded goods, escorts treat their bodies as commodities (e.g., beauty of an escort, body measurements), on the other hand, as a service, escort providers offer experiences in exchange for money (e.g., intimacy) and use tensile pricing (or extremely vague innuendos to hint the price of the services) to promote their services in online personals. The research discussed here identified underlying conceptual commonalities that work toward understanding the legal and social implications of escort services promotion. To understand the intrinsic attributes of online personals, a look at the advertising appeals at their core is needed. The next section of the literature review will link the conceptual schemas for advertising that relies on emotion as opposed to logic with respective frameworks for transformational and informational advertising appeals.

Informational and Transformational Advertising Research Review

It is widely accepted today that advertising appeals, which are capable of enhancing one's status and invoking emotions be categorized as transformational, whereas advertising appeals that construct logical arguments and provide factual information are categorized as informational (Swaminathan, Zinkhan, & Reddy, 1996; Steverman, 2011). When studying the content of services advertising, Puto and Wells (1984) were the first to distinguish between informational (i.e., information processing) and transformational (i.e., experiential) advertising appeals. They applied the framework for informational and transformational appeals to traditional services. To explore the effects of these two appeals, they developed the measure of informational and transformational advertising content, which assessed attitudes of the participants in their study to a university hospital advertising campaign (Puto & Wells, 1984). As a result, they found that consumers reacted differently to different advertising appeals used in the promotion of the same product or a service. The study by Puto and Wells (1984) became a seminal study in a sequence of research about effectiveness of different advertising appeals.

Another influential study conducted by Swaminathan et al. (1996) evaluated the likelihood of use of transformational as opposed to informational advertising. A resulting conceptual model outlined key factors contributing to the decision of advertising practitioners and which type of appeal to employ, such as: 1) product conspicuousness, 2) ego product involvement, 3) advertising for service vs. product, 4) product homogeneity, 5) technological stability, 6) newness of the product, 7) level of risk associated with buying a product, 8) cognitive product involvement, and 9) price elasticity.

According to the model, the first five factors contribute to transformational advertising, whereas the last four factors favor informational ad approaches. Among other things, the study cautioned using the terms of informational and transformational advertising with caution, noting that the instances of exclusively transformational or informational appeals in ads are extremely rare; more often than not ads use both advertising appeals.

Elaborating on key elements from the transformational model, Swaminathan et al. (1996) suggested that *product conspicuousness* allows consumers to perceive products or services as their extensions that elevate their status; *ego product involvement* explains the influence of the issues personally relevant to consumers on their decisions; *product homogeneity* allows consumers to build perceptions of products as closely related substitutes of one another; *technological stability* helps consumers to think of services and products lacking any technological innovations. As to the informational components of the model relevant for this study, *the level of risk* is associated with a product or service was represented by laws, policies or regulations whether imposed by the government, independent agencies, or independent entities that could potentially bring harm to the consumer using the product or service; *cognitive product involvement* is associated with the amount of time dedicated to thinking about a possible purchase; *price elasticity* is related to the exclusivity of the product, availability of sales/discounts/coupons, and the need of consumer to have it.

Subsequent research on the application of the framework for informational and transformational advertising appeals to different services also contributed to an understanding of advertising effectiveness. For instance, when studying health care

services, Stern (1990; 1997) confirmed previous research by finding that transformational advertising relies on tactics that trigger an emotional response, whereas informational advertising gains attention "by stimulating consumer identification with the problem situation" (Stern, 1990, p. 22). She emphasized that the goal of transformational advertising is to be poetic, to elicit "emotional authenticity," warmth, and create "emphatic consumer bonding" (p. 23). In comparison, the goal of informational advertising is to be factual, and to provide useful and necessary information.

Next, a link between the type of advertising appeal and service category was established as a factor determining effectiveness of informational and transformational appeals. Laskey, Seaton, and Nicholls (1994) argued that transformational advertisements are ineffective if compared to informational advertisements in the promotion of travel services. While studying print advertisements for travel agencies and health establishments, Laskey et al. (1994) coded advertisements for formats (text-only as opposed to text-visuals) and advertising appeals (informational vs. transformational). As a result of the study, they found that "informational advertisements, especially the ones that employed both text and visuals, were more effective in disseminating their messages than transformational advertisements" (p. 15).

At the same time, Albers-Miller and Stafford (1999) observed heavy reliance of travel services advertising on transformational appeals. Aimed to determine the nature of advertising appeals used by different categories of services, Albers-Miller and Stafford (1999) analyzed 950 advertisements from magazines published in 11 countries. The researchers found that almost 90% of the advertisements for utilitarian (financial) services contained one or more informational appeals, while the majority of

advertisements for experiential (travel) services relied on transformational appeals (Albers-Miller & Stafford, 1999, p. 399). Therefore, Albers-Miller and Stafford (1999) found that in comparison to utilitarian services, experiential services advertising relied more heavily on transformational (e.g., emotional and expressive) appeals than informational (rational) appeals.

Additionally, research on informational and transformational advertising appeals found that the effectiveness of services advertising depends not only on the type of service, but also on timing of the advertisement, health of the economy, and legal status of a product. For instance, Lee, Chung, and Taylor (2011) found that under normal circumstances most advertisements for financial services employed transformational appeals; however, during financial crises most of them would switch to informational appeal. At the same time, while conducting another study on financial services advertising in times of recession, Lee et al. (2011) concluded that most of the financial institutions changed the advertising appeals within their messages from transformational to informational (Lee et al., 2011).

Overall, the promotion of risky services benefits from transformational advertising more than it does from informational advertising. In their study on controversial services, Day and Stafford (1997) indicate that as perceptions of social risks associated with consumption of such services increase, so do the barriers to their promotion. Hence, new tactics of promotion are needed not only to grab consumers' attention, but also to stimulate the adoption of a service. Day and Stafford (1997) found that the experiential services advertised with transformational appeals benefited more from advertising than utilitarian services advertised with informational appeals. Although

Day and Stafford (1997) studied age-related cues in retail services advertising, the findings from their study are applicable to advertising services associated with social risks, including escort services.

Finally, motivations of consumers in regard to their consumption of controversial services present one more factor influencing the effectiveness of services advertising. To consider all possible interpretations of consumer motivations triggered by the escort advertisement, it is beneficial to look at the escort personals in the context of the Rossiter and Percy Planning Grid (RPPG). The grid accounts for earlier experiences of consumers with services or brands as well as consumers' assessment of the risks associated with purchases. Depending on the product's (or service) price, promise, consumers' awareness and attitude toward it, consumers are bound to experience either high or low involvement when considering a purchase (Rossiter & Percy, 1991). The higher the price (social, psychological, economical, criminal), the higher is the involvement of the consumer.

If consumers are accustomed to risk-taking and buying services that require prior conviction before purchase (brand involvement is high), their level of involvement with a product might drastically change if deciding to purchase a legal service such as therapeutic massage. Also, RPPG differentiates consumers' motivations into positive and negative categories, where positive motivational appeals are about conspicuous consumption and pleasing one's senses, whereas negative motivational appeals and experiences are about avoidance of unpleasant consequences of consumption (Rossiter & Percy, 1991). If in the case of the former, the positive experience from consuming an escort service might be the exposure to a special erotic massage technique, in the case of the latter, the negative experience from consuming an escort service might be the desire

to avoid punitive actions from the legal system, if one is caught engaging in sexual solicitation.

Consumers have unlimited choices when it comes to choosing brands, Rossiter and Percy's Planning Grid accounts for differences in consumers' involvement with almost all brands (brand choice involvement). For instance, when choosing to call or not the numbers listed in the online ads for escort services, potential consumers are faced with different options such as race of the escort service provider, body structure, age, nationality, price, and promises within the ad. Naturally, a customer's brand choice involvement would be different, if presented with a purely informational advertising appeal (an ad that would only list a phone number, the name of the escort service provider, and a couple of sentences about the promise of the service) as opposed to the transformational advertising appeal (an ad that along with provision of some practical information regarding the provider also contains a service experience promise). In fact in the case of transformational advertising if faced with the task of remembering the brand consumers will first remember the ad's promise in terms of sensual experience and only after that they will remember the brand (Puto & Wells, 1984). Indeed when it comes to transformational advertising most of which will rely on sexual appeal cues the phrase "sex sells" as it is mentioned by Pollay (1986) takes on a new meaning.

Given the controversial nature of escort services, even when looking for legal sex-related services (e.g., genuine massage services and health clubs), consumers know that they have must be cautious when calling the numbers listed online in the escorts section of *Backpage*. As a result, high purchase involvement when buying an escort or body rub service could be explained by the risks associated with these services. In general,

informational and transformational advertising appeals explain the marketing side of escort services advertising. Escort service personals fit within the framework for informational and transformational advertising, because they could be purely informational, transformational, or a mix of the two. However, a different set of tools is needed to explore social, moral, and regulatory facets of escort services advertising.

Whereas the framing of the discussion about online personals as informational and transformational advertising appeals is useful, the issues of self-sexualization are as well. A look at the research on sexual appeal as a part of transformational advertising appeal in advertising is necessary in order to conceptually contextualize the nature of online personals. By presenting previous research on sexual appeal in advertising, the next section will conclude the construction of the lens that will aid the subsequent investigation.

Sex Appeal Research Review

As visual imagery is more prevalent in advertisements exhibiting transformational than informational purchase motivations, transformational advertising is more prone to using sexual appeals than informational advertising (Reichert et al., 2012). Visual cues and emotional verbal claims of a transformational advertisement comprise ads' principal attributes (Reichert et al., 2001; Reichert & Lambiase, 2003). Overall, sexual appeal in advertising is becoming more predominant than it was a couple of decades ago: Analyzing the dress style of the models portrayed in the advertisements from magazines published in 1964 and 1984, Soley and Reid (1988) identified a trend of advertising models "wearing less than males in 1984 general interest magazines, but not in 1964

issues" (p. 963). An update of this study, analyzing advertisements from 1983 to 2003, confirmed this tendency (Reichert & Carpenter, 2004).

More specifically, the results of the content analysis of magazine advertising conducted by Soley and Reid (1988) suggested that in 1964, more models portrayed alone within the ads were suggestively than partially clad (26.9% vs. 7.7%). As to the photos where several people were portrayed, including men, the female models were partially clad more often than suggestively clad (21.7% vs. 13%). The numbers for the year of 1984 were similar: 13.8% vs. 24.1% (partially vs. suggestively clad) for the ads with female models only and 20.6 vs. 7.2% for the ads with models of both genders (p. 965). Expanding on seminal studies about sexual advertising appeal, Reichert and Lambiase (1999) found that that overall, advertising was significantly more explicit in 1993 compared to 1983 (28% of female models were dressed provocatively in 1983 compared to 40% in 1993). However, there were more partially clad than suggestively clad female models in 1983 than in 1993 (14% vs. 12%). In comparison, there were more suggestively clad female models in 1993 than in 1983 (18% vs. 16%).

Although the degree to which sexual content is present in an advertisement varies, people interpret certain advertising stimuli as sexual (Reichert & Ramirez, 2000). To define sexual appeal in one phrase, Reichert and Lambiase (2008) referred to it as "an instance of sex in advertising." To define it more explicitly, Reichert, Heckler, and Jackson (2001, p. 14) referred to it as messages "whether as brand information in advertising contexts or as persuasive appeals in social marketing contexts, that are associated with sexual information." Hence, sexual appeal can be broadly defined as

persuasive appeals that contain sexual information integrated within the overall message for either brands or services.

Historically, research on sexual appeals in advertising began in the 1960s, motivated in part by the attempt to "understand *how* sexual content influences the advertising communication process" (Reichert, 2002, p. 242). The content, effects, and personal characteristics of the target audiences were the main focus of the earlier studies on sexual appeal in advertising. In reviewing the history of sexual appeal in advertising, Reichert (2002) points out five research elements commonly considered sex in advertising: body display, sexual behavior, contextual factors, sexual referents, and sexual symbolism. By focusing upon these topics, the reviewed studies explored the mechanics of advertising processing; including behavioral and psychological changes in target audiences. Content analysis found that females were more likely than males to be portrayed in sexually suggestive posture or nude (Soley & Kurzbard, 1986). Subsequent studies on this topic laid groundwork for the research on sexual appeal in advertising (Soley & Reid, 1988; Paek & Nelson, 2007; Hennink-Kaminski & Reichert, 2011).

Because of their explicit focus on body display, sexual referents, and sexual symbolism, these studies represent the most relevant literature from which definitions and measures helpful to inspect the content of online personals conducted by this project could be drawn. Methodologically, to determine the degree of nudity or sexual suggestiveness present within an advertisement, Soley and Reid (1988) used four categories for dress styles. These categories were successfully tested and subsequently used in similar studies (see Table 2.4).

At a more general level of building on Gould's (1991) work on sexual appeal in advertising while analyzing textual and visual cues, Reichert and Lambiase (2003) identified three types of "common sexual promises." These promises or "subsets of an appeal to conform to idealized and gendered appearance and/or sexual performance" consisted of the following:

- (1) enhancement of sexual attractiveness for the consumer of the service
- (2) increase in the odds of engagement in sexual behavior (and more enjoyment from these encounters)
- (3) development of self-esteem and feelings of being sexy or sensual

Although these promises are not mutually exclusive, using explicit visuals or implicit textual references an advertisement could "offer more than one appeal" (Reichert & Lambiase, 2003, p. 124). For instance, compared to advertisements targeting women, sexual appeal was used in the advertisements targeting men as a means of promising more and better sex (Reichert & Lambiase, 2003). The same study found that sexual appeal was used in cosmetic surgery advertisements "as a means of boosting sex-esteem and enhancing one's sexual attractiveness, a pattern different from that of branded consumer products and services" (Reichert & Hennink-Kaminski, 2011, p. 45).

Interestingly, personals for escort services present an opportunity to test this finding. Having intimacy at their core, which is supplemented by attributes of branded goods, personals for escort services might challenge the statement about the infrequent use of sexual appeal as a means of boosting self-esteem in controversial services advertising. This issue will be explored in depth later in the discussion section of this study.

On another note, because the majority of the studies in advertising are concerned about its effectiveness and how it works, the effectiveness of using sexual appeal in advertising has been a key theme as well. That sexual appeal in advertising is effective if the service is congruent with the advertising appeal is a consistent finding (Peterson & Kerin, 1977; Paek & Nelson, 2007). For instance, in a study on advertising effectiveness of sexual appeal for different categories of products, Peterson and Kerin (1977) experimented with demure, seductive, and nude treatments of advertising models promoting a product from general category (ratchet wrench set) and a product related to personal hygiene (body oil). They found that the ads using nude models, while advertising household appliances (e.g., ratchet wrench set) were judged least appealing; the products were judged to be lower in quality and the company less reputable. The opposite was true for seductive model/body oil treatment combination, providing evidence that congruency of a product with advertising appeal plays a role in successful advertising.

Another study on brand and services strategies conducted by Stern (1990) used the theoretical framework of fantasy-functional appeals, while conducting research on the fantasy fulfillment as the key factor in the effectiveness of transformational advertisements. When comparing different advertising appeals, Stern (1990) pointed out that effectiveness of the "sex as love" appeal depended on the ability of an advertisement to attract attention "by offering the audience a quick nostalgia 'fix' through positive association of surface and core story" (Stern, 1990, p. 22). Her research confirmed the findings of earlier studies regarding the congruency of the marketed services and congruency between the use of transformational and sexual advertising appeals.

Recognizing the importance of sexual appeal in advertising not only due to its effectiveness, but also due to its ability to spark controversies, researchers also explored the ethical dimensions of selling with sex. For instance, in an effort to study advertising values, i.e., predecessors for advertising appeals, Pollay (1983) identified several advertising appeals, two of which were associated with such advertising values as: "sex as love" and "sex as physiology." At the same time, Richmond and Hartman (1982) labeled similar appeals as fantasy and functional advertising appeals. Finding more connections between the existing concepts in his research related to advertising appeals, Pollay (1983) linked advertising values of "sex as love" and "sex as physiology" to transformational and informational ad appeals.

Almost a decade later, realizing that the promotion of services is going to be a success only if all components of marketing mix associated with sexual appeal are taken into consideration, many researchers started focusing on the interplay of advertising effectiveness and emotional states of their target audience. Applying the findings from these studies (Stern, 1990; Richmond & Hartman, 1982; Pollay, 1983) to online personals, "sex as love" fantasy-transformational appeal will rely on emotional stories, whereas "sex as a physiological need" functional-informational appeal will address customers' sexual needs first. Hence, online personals will invoke emotional authenticity in clients exposed to messages using "sex as love" advertising appeal. In turn, these messages will create a story and link clients' "feel-good" memories with an escort services (Williamson, 1978), strengthening the bond between a client and an escort and making it hard for the clients to abandon their habit of visiting escorts. In fact, by telling stories related to the dreams of prospective clients, online personals that employ

advertising appeals of "sex as love" will become not only relevant, but also essential to the lifestyles of their clients. They will fulfill clients' fantasies (Marchand, 1985), achieving the goal of controversial services advertising and chaining the client to the circle of emotional dependency that could only be broken by calling an escort.

Table 2.1.

*Subsections for Adult Sections of Craigslist and Backpage (2013)**

<i>Craigslist: personals section</i>	<i>Backpage: adult section</i>
strictly platonic	Escorts
women seek women	body rubs
women seeking men	strippers & strip clubs
men seeking women	dom & fetish
men seeking men	ts ^{vi}
misc romance	male escorts
casual encounters	phone & websites
missed connections	adult jobs
rants and raves	

*Note.** Updated in 2012 to include extensive *Terms of Use*

Table 2.2.

Notice to Posters. Posting Rules, Backpage

You agree to the following when posting in this category:

- I will not post obscene or lewd and lascivious graphics or photographs which depict genitalia, actual or simulated sexual acts or naked images;
- I will not post any solicitation directly or in "coded" fashion for any illegal service, including exchanging sexual favors for money or other valuable consideration;
- I will not post any material on the Site that exploits minors in any way;
- I will not post any material on the Site that in any way constitutes or assists in human trafficking;
- I am at least 18 years of age or older and not considered to be a minor in my state of residence.

Any post exploiting a minor in any way will be subject to criminal prosecution and will be reported to the [Cybertipline](#) for law enforcement.

Postings violating these rules and our *Terms of Use* are subject to removal without refund.

Note. * This content is depicted as it was available in the "Posting Rules" section in 2011-2012. The posting rules were subsequently updated in September 2012 to include more extensive *Terms of Use*.

Table 2.3.

Notice about Clearance Compliance Requirements, Backpage

Policies	Examples
Do not post naked images	Uncovered genitalia, bare butts, nipple or nipple area, sex acts, etc.
Do not post images using transparent clothing, graphic box or pixalization to cover bare breasts or genitalia	
Pricing for legal adult services must be for a minimum of one hour	15 minute services are not allowed, no blank pricing, etc.
Ads can be a maximum length of 500 characters	
Do not use code words	'greek', gr33k 'bbbj', 'blow', GFE, PSE, 'trips to greece', etc.
Do not suggest an exchange of sex acts for money.	
Do not post content which advertises an illegal service.	Sex work
Postings not complying with the terms of use are subject to removal	
Postings in this category are \$10.00	
<i>Note.</i> * This content is depicted as it was available in the "Write Ad" and "Preview Ad" sections in 2011-2012.	

Table 2.4.

Categories for Coding Dress Style

"suggestively clad"	"partially clad"	"nude"
an open blouse, a shirt or a gown, especially with exposed chest area	bare back	no clothes or wearing only towel
full-length lingerie (except see-through)	bare shoulders	translucent under apparel or lingerie
a mini-skirt, a short-skirt	bathing suits	see-through lingerie
a muscle shirt	under apparel	bare body
a hiked skirt that expose the thigh or an evening gown showing excessive thigh	three-quarter length or shorter lingerie	Silhouette
tight clothing*	Bikini* (Paek & Nelson, 2007)	no clothes above/below the navel* (Paek & Nelson, 2007)
tight clothing which enhances the figure* (Paek & Nelson, 2007)	bare thighs* (Paek & Nelson, 2007)	if the photo is composed so that to conceal genitalia* (Hennink-Kaminski & Reichert, 2011).

Note. * Research on dress styles of advertising models and body exposure gets updated: (Paek & Nelson, 2007; Hennink-Kaminski & Reichert, 2013)

The core components for dress category were developed in the seminal study on advertising in magazines by Soley and Reid (1988, p. 962)

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Content analysis was chosen as the method for discovering the answers to the content-based inquiries posed by this study. Since it provides "a scientific, quantitative, and generalizable description of communications content" (Kassarjian, 1977, p. 10), content analysis has been widely used in advertising studies exploring the content of ad message (Finn & Strickland, 1982; Williamson, 1978), such as: portrayals of power (Holladay, 2010), race- and gender-related themes (Reid, King, & Kreshel, 1991; Taylor, 2003), and representational trends (Mays & Brady, 1990; Soley & Kurzbard, 1986; Soley & Reid, 1988).

Sampling Procedure

Online personals reach a national audience interested in sexual encounters. Posters of personals have an opportunity to publish their ads online through local and international websites. While *Craigslist* was once the leader in adult, escort services advertising, since the closure of "adult" and "censored" sections on *Craigslist* in 2010, the "adult" section of *Backpage* has become the primary site for those interested in publishing online personals, as well as the most popular online classifieds visited by those looking for sex (AIM, 2010).

This study analyzed a systematic random sample of unduplicated online personals published in the "escorts" subsection of "adult" services on *Backpage* in four cities from July 2011 to June 2012. This timeframe was chosen to give time to the posters of

Craigslist to migrate to other sites, because September 2011 marked the one year anniversary of *Craigslist's* closure, making the goal of studying ads from 2011-2012 logical. As to the choice of the medium, *Backpage* has earned 33 percent more in online prostitution ad revenue in March 2012 (at least \$2.6 million) as many of its posters migrated from *Craigslist* (Norfleet, 2012).

The four U.S. cities – New York, Atlanta, Chicago, and San Francisco – were selected based upon three criteria; geographical location, proximity to major airports, and cosmopolitanism. Geographically, New York, Atlanta, Chicago, and San Francisco represent the East, South, Midwest, and West regions of the United States. Major airports are venues for illegal activities, including human trafficking (Ferrell, 2014; Murase, 2014; Lupella, 2014; Reavy, 2014). These four cities have large airports, Atlanta's Hartsfield–Jackson and Chicago's O'Hare International airports are the two largest in the United States; New York's JFK and San Francisco's International airports are the sixth and the seventh largest. Additionally, though it is recognized that sexual exploitation occurs everywhere, these four cities are considered major hubs for adult entertainment. Sex work is illegal in these cities as it is in most of the United States; however, *Backpage* represents "the online equivalent of a European red-light district, contained and easily monitored by the police" (Fisher, 2012), its unusual place in the economy of sex-related services in these four cities regarding policy of publishing any sex-related ads deserves particular attention.

Selection of escort personals analysis in this project was based upon several criteria. Only online personals promoting either massage or escort services published in the "escorts" subsection of the "adult" section of the *Backpage* were included. Online

personals for massage services published in the "escorts" subsection were included in the pool because sex workers disguised as masseuses frequently promote their services there. Ads for other services, such as human trafficking helplines and warnings about schemes of dishonest service providers were not included.

McLeod (1982, p. 28) argued for similarities between prostitution and other "women's work." Today though "male and transgender sex workers...comprise a sizeable segment of the trade" (Weitzer, 2013), prostitution is still considered to be an overwhelmingly "women's profession" (Katsulis, 2008). Given that, this study focused on personals posted by females; all other personals with the exception of those posted by individuals who self-identified as bi-sexual were excluded from the sample. Only ads containing sufficient content were chosen (e.g., all ads without photos or less than 1% of all ads in the originally uploaded sample were excluded).

Units of Analysis

The online personals were uploaded from the website of *Backpage* once every two weeks over the course of one year (July, 2011 - June, 2012) with the help of Website Copier 3.47-27, a software program for website upload. This software allows for the retrieval of data from the websites, including archival data, more efficiently than manual retrieval.

Backpage's policy is to keep the data on the server accessible for the public for six months; however, the researcher uploaded the data every two weeks to diminish the error rate. Only 1 in 30 ads (3.3%) was unreadable or contained errors (in the case of once-in-six-months upload, the error rate was 16.7%).

This once-in-two-weeks upload yielded a total of 23,142 ads from all four cities for the period from July 2011 to June 2012. Eliminating ads containing errors resulted in a total of 22,378 ads from all four cities, i. e., 6,599 ads for New York, 4,774 ads for Atlanta, 5,591 ads for Chicago, and 5,414 ads for San Francisco. Because the purpose of this study was to focus on advertising content, duplicated ads were eliminated. No personal ad posted by the same person or entity was analyzed more than once (Reid, King, & Kreshel, 1991, p. 877).

An ad was considered a duplicate if it contained photos of the same person; however, it was not considered a duplicate if the person in photos was wearing different clothing or if the photos were taken in different periods of time. The ad was also not considered a duplicate if it contained the same text, but used previously unpublished online photos of different escort service providers. Following the procedure of selecting duplicates employed by Hennink-Kaminski (2006), each personal ad was given a unique identifier and stored on a computer hard drive. The copies of the personals within each city were compared by the researcher and the first instance of a personal was identified and counted in the unduplicated sample. The duplicates were excluded from the data pool. A total of 25% of the ads for every month from July 2011 to June 2012 was selected using random integer generator. A total of 4,956 randomly selected unduplicated ads met all criteria (see Table 3.1).

Opinions on what portion of the data should be analyzed in order to achieve minimum acceptable reliability vary. Wimmer and Dominick (2003) say that the sample analyzed should be from 10% to 25% of content universe, while Kaid and Wadsworth (1989, p. 208) argue that having a sample of 5% to 7% is enough. The sample size of

25% used in this study was based upon the requirements to generate a sample with confidence intervals that would ensure the achievement of minimal acceptable reliability outlined by Lacy and Riffe (1996). They identified the acceptable minimal level of agreement and acceptable percent level of probability (sampling error is $\leq 5\%$ for the assumed population level of agreement) as 85 and 95 percent respectively:

$$S.E. = \text{SQR} (P \times Q) / n - 1 \times \text{SQR} N - n / N - 1, \text{ where:}$$

P = percentage of agreement in population

$$Q = (1 - P)$$

N = the population size

n = the sample size

Coding Categories

The coding scheme used in this study was designed to cover textual and visual content of online personals, including their sexual, informational, and transformational content. A total of 33 categories were included in the codebook with illustrative textual and visual examples. The textual categories represented: 1) features of the advertisement, 2) features of the service, 3) responsibilities of the client, and 4) description of the service provider. The visual categories represented the 5) appearance and 6) demeanor of an escort service provider.

Given the interdisciplinary nature of online personals and their promotion, the categories for content analysis were built with an eye on literature drawn from advertising and sociology. All operationalizations of visually-oriented advertising content were adapted from previous content analyses on sex and nudity in advertising (Lin, 1998; Kunkel, 2007; Paek & Nelson, 2007; Reichert & Lambiase, 2003; Soley & Reid, 1988;

Sung & Hennink-Kaminski, 2008). Operationalizations of service-oriented content, specifically, the content related to personals for escort services, were adapted from previous studies on escort, massage, and sex work services (Castle & Lee, 2008; Agresti, 2009), sexual objectification (Bell & Milic, 2002; Goffman, 1979; McKee, 2005; Lawton, 2009; Holladay, 2010), and self-disclosure online (Qian & Scott, 2007). The sections that follow provide a brief summary of the categories, providing additional clarification when necessary. The codebook is available in the Appendix B.

Text: Features of the Online Personal

The coders were instructed to code every personal for month and city. Apart from that, they were trained to pay attention to the age of the escort service provider (as it was indicated by the poster herself), shorthand language, exclusive racial promotion of a service, presence of other people, advertising frame, and self-censorship of the photo.

Listed Age of the Escort Service Provider

Clearance policies of *Backpage* specify that all posters publishing online personals within the escorts section should be at least 18 years old. That is why there were no personals in which posters would have indicated that their age was less than that of 18. The coders were instructed to indicate the age of the escort service provider as it was listed on the advertisement within the "Poster's Age" line. Even though it is not marked specifically with those words in the personal, every poster has an option of filling this line before posting ad online. The purpose of this activity is to ensure that no minor is posting ads within the escorts section. However, the poster may choose to skip this step and leave the "Poster's Age" line blank. In that case, if nothing is indicated near the title

of the personal (where the "Poster's Age" line with age should be located according to the template for every online personal), the coders were instructed to put "99."

Presence of Shorthand Language

The presence of any kind of the shorthand language or specific abbreviations for different actions and services: "BBW"^{vii} or "420 friendly,"^{viii} but also small abbreviations: "&" and "u," standing for words "and" and "you" was recoded.

Escort Services Availability to Members of Different Racial Groups

Due to the refusal of certain providers to offer services to people of certain race, the category of diversity was included. If the ad had any mentions that the provider was not available to members of certain racial groups, it was coded as "1."

Presence of People Other than the Escort Service Provider

To account for any people other than the provider within the photo, the coders were instructed to code the ad as "1" if they saw somebody else present within the photo.

Personal Ad Frame

The classification of Bell and Milic (2002) was adapted to indicate the position of the provider within the photo. The coders had a choice of coding the ad as having a "front," "side," or "rear" views. If it was hard to be certain about the position of the provider within the photo, "9" was put in the category for advertising frame.

Personal Ad Self-Censorship

The variable of self-censorship was to register any deviations in the look of the photos of escort service providers. This study defines self-censorship as any digital distortion of the photo. This distortion represents an attempt by the poster to hide the content of the photo, which is usually done by applying digital techniques to the photo in

the areas of face or body. Distortions such as blurring and cropping the photos prevent viewers of the personals to see the features of the escort service providers. All online personals were coded for presence/absence of ad photo self-censorship. As suggested by Qian and Scott (2007), the coders were instructed to pay attention to this so-called "visual anonymity" of the providers represented by self-censorship in this particular case. To do that, they distinguished between four types of self-censorship: "1" self-censorship of the eyes only, "4" self-censorship of the full face, and self-censorship of any part of the body (e.g., "2" breasts, "3" genitalia). Photos without self-censorship were coded as "5."

Text: Features of the Escort Service

The purpose of coding these categories was to characterize the nature of the escort services. The content variables coded in this section described location of the provider, professional philosophy, any methods of promotion of the service/any mentions about donations, techniques for reassurance of the client, fulfillment of desires, and, finally, variety of services offered.

Escort Service Location

The coders were trained to notice if the provider offered service "in" or "out" (Castle & Lee, 2008). If providers had their own apartment or the hotel/other apartment for the clients, then the coders were instructed to code this as "in-call" or "1." If the service provider offered to come to the client's house, client's hotel or some other premises arranged by a client, then the coders coded this arrangement for service as an "out-call" or "2." Ads containing in-call and out-call opportunities were coded as "3."

Escort Service Provider's Professional Philosophy

The coding scheme for professionalism of the provider was partially adapted from Monson and Hamilton (2010); professionalism for this study was coded in the following ways:

- "1" - A legal disclaimer is present within the ad. It clarifies that the provider is not involved in sex soliciting. Instead, the provider is offering a legal service and anything that happens during the visit "happens between two consenting adults." Moreover, any donations "are for time and companionship only." This disclaimer also contained a warning that if someone who is working for any law enforcement agency calls the provider, this is considered "entrapment."
- "2" - There is an emphasis on the skills of the provider.
- "3" - The reviews of the provider are emphasized.
- "4" - The elite status of the provider and service experience are stated.

Solicitation of Donations

The classification of direct or indirect methods of promotion was adapted from Agresti (2009). If the personal mentioned only the contact information of the provider (e.g., phone, email), it was coded as "1." If it mentioned methods of payment for services only, it was coded as "2," if it mentioned different specials, and prices of the services or donations, it was coded as "3."

Reassurance of Clients

If the personal was addressing the client by telling him: "Don't be shy, call us!" The ad was coded as having psychological reassurance or "1." If the personal mentioned that the escort provider offered "No games, no rush, no drama" atmosphere, it was coded as "2." Providers offer unrushed service in hopes that their clients would appreciate the

difference in the atmosphere while at home, where some of the clients deal with moodiness of their significant others on a daily basis as opposed to the place of an escort provider, where the client is always welcomed.

Promise of Satisfaction

Many escort service providers rely on promising their clients fulfillment of desires. Coders ascertained whether any promises of any form were evident within the personal. This category was coded as either "1" (Yes) or "2" (None).

Variety of Services

The "diversity of the service" variable was defined as a promise of the escort service provider to offer a variety services, including massage and various fetishes (e.g., "BDSM,"^{ix} feet and toys fetishes). If the ad promised massage service, it was coded as "3," if there was no promise of any kind of special services, it was coded as "2," if any mention of the availability of fetishes was evident, it was coded as "1."

Text: Clients' "Code of Honor"

Clients' "Code of Honor" goes hand in hand with the features of the service. Some personals would clearly state clients' responsibilities regarding the service provided, the rituals of paying for it, and the language used. The personals pertaining to the category of "Clients' Code of Honor" were covered by two variables, "requirement to be discreet" and "prerequisite to behave oneself properly" (Kaye & Sapolsky, 2001).

Escort Service Discretion

The variable of "discretion" is described as any promise on the part of the escort services provider that deals with safety of the client on the premises of the escort.

Client Conduct

The variable of "client conduct" captured the client's duty to be courteous during the meeting with an escort provider. It also stated requirements of the service providers, such as no texting and no calling from personal phone numbers.

Text: Description of the Escort Service Provider

The following content variables were coded to provide a description of the escort service provider: quantity of escort service providers promoted, presence of an agency posting ads for escort service providers, physique of escort service providers, emphasis on nationality/race, and character/status of the provider.

Multiple Escort Service Providers

This variable accounted for instances of escort service providers working in teams of two or more (e.g., friends working together, roommates living together, sisters visiting the city together). In many instances, one provider would post the ad while speaking about the existence of another briefly.

Escort Service Provider's Agency (Posting Ads on behalf of the Escort Service Providers)

Related to the previous variable, this variable was to record instances in which online personals about services of the escort service providers were posted by others, as was frequently in cases when providers were working in teams. The existence of a third party posting the personals and selling services of providers, indicated the presence of a pimp or other entity "in charge" of the escort business. In these cases, the escort service providers had minimal agency.

Escort Service Provider's Description

The physical appearance of the provider was just as important as her description posted online. If the provider offered no description of herself, it was marked as "1." Information about bust and/or cup size was coded as "2," height and weight of the providers was coded as "3," hair and eye color was coded as "4." If the provider mentioned at least two of the options mentioned above, the coders the ad as "5" in this category.

Escort Service Provider's Nationality

The emphasis on the nationality of the provider was to ensure that any mention of ethnic background or nationality was recorded. Nationality or ethnicity was coded only if the provider explicitly referred to either of them within the text. Such reference was coded as "1" or "2" in the case of its absence. The nationality variable was coded as "2" if the personals containing photos of ethnic-looking escort service providers had no mentions about race or nationality in the ad.

Escort Service Provider's Character

This category captured key features of the provider's attitude toward her work and herself. The coders indicated "1" when a provider mentioned her independence from any agency, they put "3" when she referred to herself as "sexy," "4" when she called herself "a girl next door" or "sweet," and "5" when provider mentioned that she was super sexy.

Visuals: Appearance of the Escort Service Provider

Each person appearing within the first photo of any online personal was classified based on several characteristics. The following visual content variables were coded in this subsection: the "perceived" age of the escort service provider/how old the provider

appears to be, race of the escort service provider, her dress, and any eye contact with the viewer of the personals.

Escort Service Provider's Perceived Age

All personals were coded for "perceived" age of the escort providers or how old the providers "appear to be." The age category was divided into four categories: "up to the age of 13," "13-17," "18-24," and "25 and above" (Reichert, 2007). The coders were instructed to pay attention whether there were any mentions of age within the text of the ad itself and not in the "Poster's age" line. The codebook supplied different photos and examples of providers of different age as guidelines.

Escort Service Provider's Race

The coding options for provider's race were as follows: Caucasian - "1," Hispanic/Latina - "2," Black - "3," Asian - "4," and mixed - "5." Visual examples for this category were supplied in the codebook as well (Armann, 2011).

Escort Service Provider's Dress

All advertisements were coded for the degree of nudity displayed by the women within the ads (Soley & Reid, 1988; Paek & Nelson, 2007). This coding variable also took into account violations of the media's clearance policies; hence, special attention was paid to dress of the providers (e.g., fully dressed, suggestively dressed, partially clad, nude).

Visuals: Demeanor of the Escort Service Provider

The following visual content variables were coded for the demeanor of the provider: face expression of a provider, any sexually suggestive postures she might have, postures in general, visibility of her face, and visibility of her body. Additionally, the

provider's sexual exposure (e.g., breasts, genitalia, buttocks, breasts and genitalia) and the type of sexual action (e.g., massage, masturbation, touching genitalia, and invitation to sexual action) was coded. The demeanor of the provider was also accounted for with the help of the licensed withdrawal variable.

Escort Service Provider's Face Expression

Face expression of the provider was coded as "1" for detached, "2" for engaged, flirty, and "3" for neutral (Goffman, 1979). If it was impossible to see the expression of the provider's face, it was coded as "9."

Escort Service Provider's Sexual Exposure

The coders were instructed to put "1" if an area of more than 1/3 of breasts was exposed, "2" and "3" if genitalia and buttocks were exposed respectively, and "4" if both breasts and genitalia were exposed (Lin, 1998).

Escort Service Provider's Sexual Action

Any sexual actions were coded so that "1" was for massage, "2" masturbation, "3" touching genitalia, "4" kissing, and "5" invitation to sexual action (Kunkel et al., 2007).

Escort Service Provider's Sexual Look

This category was to code the actions of the provider that make her look sexually suggestive (Paek & Nelson, 2007; Goffman, 1979). This variable would be coded as "1" when the provider has her eye half-closed; "2" when the provider has her lips half-open; "3" when she has her legs spread out, and "4" when she is touching the parts of her body. If two or more actions were present within the photo at the same time, the coders were instructed to choose the most prominent action.

Escort Service Provider's Posture

The providers' posture was coded as "1" if she was standing, "2" if she was kneeling, "3" if she was reclining, "4" if she was lying down, "5" if she was sitting, or "9" if her posture was impossible to determine (Holladay, 2010).

Escort Service Provider's Face Visibility

The visibility of the escort service provider's face was coded as fully visible (then it was coded as "1"), not visible at all (coded as "2"), and hidden/only half of it or less was visible (coded as "3").

Escort Service Provider's Body Visibility

The body of the escort provider was coded "1" when it was portrayed in full size, "2" when only the head and neck were portrayed, "3" when a torso shot was made, and "4" when the photo was cropped in several parts so that more than 10 percent of the body was not visible (McKee, 2005).

Escort Service Provider's Licensed Withdrawal

Goffman (1979) defined licensed withdrawal as a situation where a woman behaved as a child or where she acted as if she were not aware of her surroundings (e.g., ignoring a camera filming her). This variable also had only two options: presence or absence of licensed withdrawal (Holladay, 2010).

Content of Online Personals: Breakdown into Informational/Transformational Divisions

Due to the nature of research questions posed by this study, all categories from the content analysis were organized into divisions to represent primarily informational, transformational, sexual, legal, and clearance compliance content.

Given that informational advertising is represented by categories that provide essential and verifiable information, among others, the following variables from this study stand for the informational division: 1) Escort Service Provider's Perceived Age, 2) Escort Service Provider's Nationality, 3) Escort Service Provider's Description, 4) Billing for Services, 5) Escort Service Provider's Character, 6) Escort Service Provider's Race, 7) Eye Contact, 8) Presence of Shorthand Language, 8) Presence of People Other than Escort Service Provider, 9) Personal Ad Frame, 10) Escort Service Location, and 11) Availability of Multiple Escort Providers.

The transformational division was comprised of variables related to sexual appeal and reflected sexual imagery, such as: 1) Escort Service Provider's Sexual Exposure, 2) Escort Service Provider's Sexual Look, and 3) Escort Service Provider's Sexual Action.

The variables associated with legality comprise the legality division:

1) Escort Service Provider's Perceived Age, 2) Escort Service Provider's Agency, 3) Service Professionalism (Disclaimer), and 4) Billing for Services.

The variables associated with media clearance compliance policies created the clearance compliance division: 1) Escort Service Provider's Perceived Age, 2) Billing for Services (price for less than 60 minutes), 3) Escort Service Provider's Sexual Exposure, 4) Escort Service Provider's Sexual Action, 5) Escort Service Provider's Sexual Look, 6) Personal Ad Self-Censorship, and 7) Escort Service Provider's Body Visibility, and 8) Escort Service Provider's Dress.

The purpose of the clearance compliance variables is to register anything prohibited from publication (e.g., nudity). For instance, the variable of Personal Ad Self-Censorship accounts for any digital distortions of the photo made either to comply by the

clearance policies, creating perception of legality, or to conceal the identity of the person. The variable of Escort Service Provider's Sexual Exposure codes any genitalia shown in the photo. The variable of Escort Service Provider's Sexual Action reveals any sexual action occurring within the photo. The variable of Escort Service Provider's Dress accounts for such transgressions in online personals as nudity and visibility of genitalia.

The variables associated with professional features of the services were combined into the professionalism division, because many online personals referred to such features of the services that would justify what they are offering. The professionalism division and its variables are also described in Table 3.2. To visualize tensions between advertising and policy compliance, all variables reflecting legality, clearance compliance, and professionalism of the escort providers were included in the grid of appeals and tactics for advertising of controversial services (see Table 3.2).

Coders and Coder Training

The reliability of the study was enhanced by dual gender perspective (Ferguson, Kreshel, & Tinkham, 1990). Three coders fluent in English (two males and one female), who were unaware of the purpose of the study analyzed all ads independently. They conducted a content analysis using 25% or 4,956 ads. To resolve contradictions between the coders, a fourth person (female), a graduate student who was a native English speaker, was recruited to be a judge. She resolved differences between the three coders and created a master file with the final version of coding for ads in all cities. Prior to coding the ads, the coders were given a codebook (Appendix B), outlining the coding process and defining variables. The codebook also included examples of coded text.

Finally, to illustrate the coding process, the research conducted a training session over Skype in which she demonstrated how to code two personal ads.

Pilot Study and Reliabilities

A two-stage pilot study for the main project was conducted in Summer/Fall 2012 to check inter-coder reliability and the clarity of the categories included in the codebook. During the first stage, coders independently reviewed a sample of 141 online personals, which were chosen with the help of an online random integer generator from data uploaded from *Backpage* before July 2011. During the second stage, the coders analyzed the same number of personals chosen using the same program from the pool of ads posted between July 2011 and June 2012.

Issues of inter-coder reliability for all data in this study were addressed using Rust and Cooil's (1994) proportional reduction in loss (PRL) reliability index for qualitative data. This index addresses the issue of the percentage of agreement between coders by accounting for the likelihood of chance agreement. Also, it offers explanations of why and how internal consistency and agreement between all coders work: having "the advantage of being useable with three or more items/judges," PRL index generalizes across different quantitative and qualitative scenarios (Rust & Cooil, p. 4). After the three coders conducted independent analysis, the data were transferred into an SPSS master file, and the overall percent agreement for each variable and reliability index were calculated.

As a result of the first part of the pilot study, the reliability indexes for three variables were lower than the critical value of .85, suggested by Perrault and Leigh (1989), namely: age - 0.73, race - 0.77, and professionalism of service - 0.79.

The low reliabilities attained after the first part of the pilot test indicated that several category definitions needed improvement. The definitions were revised and coding categories were amended to enhance clarity. Additional training of the coders over Skype was undertaken. During this session the researcher clarified the meaning of the variables. Using two ads as examples, the researcher demonstrated how to code online personals, paying particular attention to the problematic categories.

Coding of the personals during the second part of the pilot study resulted in agreement coefficients ranging from 0.86 for age to 1.00 for availability of the service to members of other race. In this second stage, the PRL reliability levels for all categories reached acceptable levels of reliability, exceeding the critical value of .85 suggested by Perrault and Leigh (1989). As a result, the 141 ads from the second portion of the pilot study were included in the main study, contributing to the sample for the city of New York (1,440 ads). During the main part of the study, the reliability indexes for all variables exceeded the critical value of 0.85 suggested by Perrault and Leigh (1989). Calculated percentages of agreement, estimated reliability, number of choices for each variable, and 95 percent confidence interval for each variable are available in Tables 3.3 and 3.4.

Table 3.1.

Selection of Online Personals

Online personals	City				Total online personals
	New York	Atlanta	Chicago	San Francisco	
Total ads uploaded (with duplicates)	6,599	4,774	5,591	5,414	22,378
Total ads selected (no duplicates)	5,739	4,320	5,040	4,704	19,803
Number of ads randomly selected per month	120	90	105	98	413
Number of ads randomly selected per year	$n = 1,440$	$n = 1,080$	$n = 1,260$	$n = 1,176$	$N = 4,956$

Table 3.2.

Professionalism, Legality, and Clearance in Personals and Ad Appeals

<i>Legality</i>	<i>Clearance Compliance</i>	<i>Professionalism</i>
<i>Escort Service Provider's Perceived Age</i>		
<i>Service Solicitation (Billing)</i>	<i>Service Solicitation (Billing, price < 60 min)**</i>	
	<i>Escort Service Provider's Sexual Exposure</i>	
	<i>Escort Service Provider's Sexual Action</i>	
	<i>Escort Service Provider's Sexual Look</i>	
	<i>Personal Ad Self-Censorship (Yes)</i>	
	<i>Visibility of Escort Service Provider's Body (Cropped)</i>	
<i>Escort Service Provider's Dress</i>		
<i>Escort Service Provider's Agency</i>		<i>Escort Service Provider's Agency</i>
<i>Service Professionalism (Disclaimer)</i>		<i>Service Professionalism (Skills, Reviews, Status)**</i>
		<i>Escort Services Availability</i>
		<i>Client Conduct</i>
		<i>Client Reassurance</i>
		<i>Service Discretion</i>
		<i>Escort Service Provider's Description</i>
		<i>Escort Service Provider's Character</i>
		<i>Variety of Services</i>
		<i>Escort Service Provider's Posture</i>
		<i>Escort Service Provider's Licensed Withdrawal</i>
		<i>Escort Service Provider's Face Visibility</i>
		<i>Promise of Satisfaction**</i>
Informational	Transformational	Informational

*Note.** A total of 21 variable was chosen to represent professionalism, legality, and clearance compliance features of the escort providers. The categories were classified as primarily transformational or informational.

*Note.*** Categories that exhibit features opposite to the advertising appeal listed as a bottom-label of their respective column.

Table 3.3.

Inter-coder Reliability Index (Text)

Variables (Text)	Number of choices for each variable (<i>K</i>)	Percentage of agreement (<i>F_o/N</i>)	Estimated Reliability (<i>I_r</i>)	95% Lower Confidence Limit, Estimated Reliability (<i>I_r</i>)
<i>Features of the Online Personal</i>				
Personal Ad Month	12.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Personal Ad City	4.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Listed Age of the Escort Service Provider	99.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Presence of Shorthand Language	2.00	0.97	0.97	0.96
Escort Services Availability	2.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Presence of People Other than the Escort Service Provider	3.00	0.93	0.95	0.93
Personal Ad Frame	4.00	0.99	0.99	0.98
Personal Ad Self-Censorship	5.00	0.96	0.97	0.96
<i>Features of the Escort Service</i>				
Escort Service Location	4.00	0.94	0.96	0.94
Escort Service Provider's Professional Philosophy	5.00	0.93	0.95	0.94
Solicitation of Donations	4.00	0.94	0.96	0.95
Reassurance of Clients	3.00	0.96	0.97	0.95
Promise of Satisfaction	3.00	0.97	0.98	0.97
Variety of Services	4.00	0.99	0.99	0.98
<i>Clients' "Code of Honor"</i>				
Escort Service Discretion	2.00	0.96	0.96	0.94
Client Conduct	4.00	0.93	0.95	0.94
<i>Escort Service Provider's Description</i>				
Multiple Escort Service Providers	2.00	0.99	0.99	0.98
Posting Ads on behalf of Escort Service Providers	2.00	0.97	0.97	0.96
Escort Service Provider's Description	5.00	0.94	0.96	0.95
Escort Service Provider's Nationality	2.00	0.97	0.97	0.96
Escort Service Provider's Business Attitude/Character	5.00	0.99	0.99	0.98

Note. $I_r = \sqrt{([F_o/N - (1/K)][K/(K-1)])}$ for $F_o/N \leq 1/K$, where F_o is the observed frequency, N is the sample size and F_o/N is the percentage of agreement.

Confidence Limits = $I_r \pm Z_c \sqrt{[I_r(1-I_r)/N]}$, where Z_c is the critical value for the c percent confidence interval and N is the sample size (Perrault and Leigh, 1989, pp. 2-6).

Table 3.4.

Inter-coder Reliability Index (Visuals)

Variables (Visuals)	Number of choices for each variable (<i>K</i>)	Percentage of agreement (<i>F_o/N</i>)	Estimated Reliability (<i>I_r</i>)	95% Lower Confidence Limit of Estimated Reliability (<i>I_r</i>)
<i>Appearance of the Provider</i>				
Escort Service Provider's Age	5.00	0.86	0.91	0.89
Escort Service Provider's Race	5.00	0.93	0.95	0.94
Escort Service Provider's Dress	5.00	0.94	0.96	0.95
Eye Contact	2.00	0.89	0.88	0.86
<i>Demeanor of the Provider</i>				
Escort Service Provider's Face Expression	4.00	0.97	0.98	0.97
Escort Service Provider's Sexual Look	5.00	0.96	0.97	0.96
Posture of the Escort Service Provider	6.00	0.91	0.95	0.93
Escort Service Provider's Face Visibility	4.00	0.91	0.94	0.92
Escort Service Provider's Body Visibility	5.00	0.94	0.96	0.95
Escort Service Provider's Sexual Exposure	5.00	0.98	0.99	0.98
Escort Service Provider's Sexual Action	6.00	0.97	0.98	0.97
Escort Service Provider's Licensed Withdrawal	3.00	0.91	0.93	0.92

Note. $I_r = \sqrt{([F_o/N - (1/K)][K/(K-1)])}$ for $F_o/N \leq 1/K$, where F_o is the observed frequency, N is the sample size and F_o/N is the percentage of agreement.

Confidence Limits = $I_r \pm Z_c \sqrt{I_r (1-I_r)/N}$, where Z_c is the critical value for the c percent confidence interval and N is the sample size (Perrault and Leigh, 1989, pp. 2-6).

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This chapter will present the results of content analysis conducted by this study. It will summarize the characteristics of online personals by reporting frequency distributions for each of the variables included in the sections on 1) features of online personals and 2) escort service; 3) "code of honor" for clients; 4) description, 5) appearance, 6) demeanor, and 7) sexual demeanor of the provider. This chapter will also offer results of chi-square analyses that compare relationships of advertising appeals with self-censorship tactics across four cities in regard to advertising and self-censorship online.

Sample Characteristics

A total of 4,956 randomly selected online personals from one-year worth of unduplicated ads were content-analyzed. This sample included 29.1% ($n = 1,440$) ads for New York, 21.8% ($n = 1,080$) ads for Atlanta, 25.4% ($n = 1,260$) ads Chicago, and 23.7% ($n = 1,176$) ads for San Francisco. Comprising 8.3% of the data pool, each month was represented by 413 ads: 120 (New York), 90 (Atlanta), 105 (Chicago), and 98 (San Francisco).

Features of Online Personals

This section describes the characteristics of online personals across four cities. It begins by providing the answer to the first research question:

RQ1: What is the content of online escort advertising? What are the main attributes mentioned by providers of escort services online?

Significant relationships between features of the online personals for all cities for three categories from this section are presented in Table 4.1.

Personal Ad Age Listed. Ages of escort service providers listed in the ads ranged from 18-100 years of age ($M = 23.5$ years, $SD = 4.9$). When posting ads, some providers identified themselves as "69" and "100" in the "Poster's Age" row, even though they did not look older than 25 years in photos.

Personal Ad Frame. The largest number of providers for escort services was featured in sidewise postures ($n = 2,546$): approximately half of ads in each city featured providers in this position. The second largest number of ads ($n = 1,832$) featured providers in front view postures. However, the posters' choices for front and rear frames differed: a front view was favored by providers from Chicago and San Francisco the most (40.5% and 43.5%), whereas New York and Atlanta ads featured providers in front-view postures only in 31.6% and 32.9% of cases respectively. Rear-views were more common in New York (15.5%) and Atlanta (15.2%) the most, whereas providers from Chicago and San Francisco favored it the least: it was present in 9.7% and 5.9% of the advertisements only ($\chi^2 = 103.160$, $df = 6$, $p < .000$).

Personal Ad Self-Censorship. Self-censorship by digital distortion of photos was one of the most frequent tactics used to obscure the face of providers within ads. Out of 1,440 and 1,080 ads published in New York and Atlanta, slightly more than half of the ads obscured entire faces of the providers: 52.4% and 54% respectively. Conversely, almost half of the ads in San Francisco were not self-censored (48.6%); moreover, the entire face

was not visible in 35.4% of ads and half of the face was not visible in 15.9% of the ads respectively. Interestingly, San Francisco had more providers self-censoring half of the face than any other city analyzed: 13.9% (New York), 10.8% (Atlanta), and 14.6% (Chicago) ($\chi^2 = 121.658$, $df = 12$, $p < .000$).

Escort Services Availability. Sometimes availability of services depends on racial preferences of providers. In regard to this issue, providers from Atlanta and Chicago were unwilling to offer their services to members of a particular racial group only in 6.9% and 8.5% of the ads for their respective cities, whereas providers from New York and San Francisco did so in 1.7% and 2.3% of the ads. In comparison to Atlanta and Chicago, New York and San Francisco represented the cities where availability of services very rarely depended on the client's race ($\chi^2 = 95.592$, $df = 3$, $p < .000$).

The relationship between the race of the provider and the provision of services to clients of certain racial groups was only significant for Atlanta, where a total of 39 Caucasian, 25 Black, 5 Hispanic, and 1 Asian provider did not make their services available to members of certain racial groups ($\chi^2 = 27.005$, $df = 4$, $p < .000$).

Interestingly, even though the relationship between the race of the provider and the provision of services to clients of certain racial groups was insignificant for Chicago, the fact that it could be considered marginally significant ($p < .068$) calls for future research.

Cross tabulations for escort services availability overall for four cities indicates that the decision to provide services was not only influenced by the clients' race ($\chi^2 = 95.592$, $df = 3$, $p < .000$), but also by the provider's race ($\chi^2 = 15.755$, $df = 5$, $p < .008$). Specifically, Caucasian providers represented the largest proportion of those who denied service to clients of another race (102 personals, 6% of all ads for four cities). In

comparison, Hispanic and Black providers represented 29 personals or 5.4% and 66 personals or 4.3%, of personals posted by providers from those racial categories.

Features of the Escort Service

This section continues providing answers to the question about the content of online ads. Significant relationships between features of the escort service are presented in Table 4.2. To provide an in-depth perspective, the following research questions were asked:

RQ1a: How is the expertise of escort service providers communicated?

RQ1b: Which traits of escort service providers are most frequently emphasized?

Escort Service Location. Providers incline to use three options to indicate the location of their services: in-call, out-call, and both. New York is the city with the most in-call locations (34.4%), whereas San Francisco is the city with the least in-call locations (9.7%). However, in comparison to other three cities, San Francisco has the most (29.9%) out-call locations and the most (23.2%) combined out-call/in-call locations ($\chi^2 = 304.485$, $df = 9$, $p < .000$).

With those results excluded, a typical online personal ad changes substantially because of the tendency of posters not to say anything about the location of the service, which was observed in 36.1% of the ads ($n = 1,790$). This fact could be explained by the willingness of the providers to offer some additional sources of contact information to those who read the ads. Depending on the provider (e.g., high-end or not), some ads refer clients to websites, whereas others supply their phone number and textual descriptions about themselves when posting ads only.

Escort Service Provider's Professional Philosophy. Providers from Atlanta contained the highest proportion of personals with disclaimers about sex solicitation (12.8%); providers from other cities only mentioned it in 4.5% of ads in New York, 5.9% of ads in Chicago, and in 2.1% of ads in San Francisco ($\chi^2 = 301.087$, $df = 12$, $p < .000$). As might be expected, because of the relative lack of professional status in regard to any sex-related activity, the overwhelming majority of the ads (60.3%, $n = 2,988$) did not offer any disclaimers about sex solicitation.

As to the promotion of sex-related skills, New York providers are prone to mentioning their skills the least: only 13.5% of ads did so, compared to 24.1% of ads from San Francisco. However, providers from New York mentioned their elite status in 16% of the ads, which is more frequent than mentions of status posted by their counterparts in Atlanta (4.1%), Chicago (9.4%), and San Francisco (9.5%). Generally, the majority of providers were inclined to be silent about their professionalism, which may reflect the controversial status of any sex-related service in the U.S. society today.

Contact and Billing Information. Among providers across four cities, providers in San Francisco were willing to place their contact numbers in the ads most often (76.5%, $n = 1,019$), whereas providers from Atlanta did so the least (54%, $n = 583$). Among those providers listing their contacts, providers from Atlanta were more likely to indicate methods of payment than providers from other cities: 46% of ads in Atlanta indicated both contact and payment information as opposed to 36.8% of ads in Chicago, 29.2% of ads in New York, and 23.5% of ads in San Francisco Overall, mentions of price were present in 1,658 ads (33.5%) ($\chi^2 = 186.989$, $df = 9$, $p < .000$).

Reassurance of Clients. Providers in Atlanta and Chicago were the most frequent suppliers of "no rush, no games, no drama" experiences: posters from these cities offered these services in 28.4% and 32.3% of ads respectively ($\chi^2 = 126.685$, $df = 6$, $p < .000$). Despite this, the tendency of mentioning nothing about reassurance prevailed: 82.1% of ads (New York), 71.1% of ads (Atlanta), 66.5% of ads (Chicago), and 79.6% of ads (San Francisco) had no claims of reassurance. A total of 23.7% of ads ($n = 1,175$) offered unrushed experiences across four cities.

Promise of Satisfaction. Roughly half of the personals posted by providers in Chicago offered fulfillment of desires (51.7%). In comparison, only 39.1% of providers mentioned it in ads for New York, 33.4% of ads stated it in ads for Atlanta, and 27.9% of ads talked about it in San Francisco ($\chi^2 = 220.407$, $df = 6$, $p < .000$). Overall, 38.4%, $n = 1,904$ of providers offered promise of satisfaction.

Variety of Services. A total of 869 ads (17.5%) offered fetish services and 317 ads (6.4%) offered massage in four cities. Except for providers in San Francisco, the palette of services was very diverse in New York (17.8%), Atlanta (17.9%), and Chicago (22.4%). As to offers of massage, the majority (8.2%, $n = 118$) was in New York, in comparison to 5.6% ($n = 60$) in Atlanta, 6.8% ($n = 86$) in Chicago, and 4.5% ($n = 53$) in San Francisco ($\chi^2 = 131.927$, $df = 9$, $p < .000$).

"Code of Honor" for Clients

Two variables under the umbrella of "Code of Honor" reflect specific details about services. Significant relationships between client-oriented categories that comprise services are presented in Table 4.3.

Escort Service Discretion. Questions of discretion were addressed by providers in Atlanta (18.3%) and Chicago (19%), more than by providers in New York (13.5%) and San Francisco (12.6%). Although general requests similar to: "Please, be discreet" statements were present in some ads, providers in all cities did not mention the need for discretion; more than 80% of online escort services advertisements posted in each city did not mention it ($\chi^2 = 29.819$, $df = 3$, $p < .000$). Only 15.7% of ads in four cities offered discreet experiences.

Client Conduct. Providers in San Francisco did not require clients to be courteous; in 79.5% of their ads it was not mentioned. Despite this overwhelming trend, providers in Chicago emphasized the need for the clients to be mature in 11.5% of the ads, whereas providers from Atlanta did so in 12.1% of ads. New York providers cared about the seriousness of their clients the least: only 7.6% of advertisements reminded clients to be mature ($\chi^2 = 94.353$, $df = 9$, $p < .000$).

Escort Service Provider's Description

The techniques used to describe escort service providers contribute to our understanding of the content of the ads. They also evoke concerns of legality regarding escort services and their advertising. This section will report the frequencies for characteristics of the service providers. The results of the chi-square analysis are indicated in Table 4.4.

Multiple Escort Service Providers. New York had the largest number of personals advertising multiple providers compared to other cities (29.9%); this number was much lower for online personals in Atlanta (16.8%), Chicago (16%), and San Francisco (6.7%) ($\chi^2 = 244.521$, $df = 6$, $p < .000$). This situation may be a reflection of New York being

more escort-agency-friendly than any other city, because of its business atmosphere and its image as the "city that never sleeps" (Auer, 1953).

Posting Ads on behalf of Providers. Almost one quarter of the personals in New York were not written by the providers themselves (24.5%). In comparison, only 4.9% of ads posted in San Francisco, 6% of ads in Chicago, and 7% of ads in Atlanta were written by someone other than the provider ($\chi^2 = 352.873$, $df = 3$, $p < .000$). This finding may correspond to the population size of the cities, with larger cities^x having more agencies or offering more services.

Escort Service Provider's Description. Ads from San Francisco offered all information about providers in 20.3 % of cases (more than in any other city), in comparison to advertisements in Atlanta that did so in only 10.7 % of cases (less than in any other city) ($\chi^2 = 75.436$, $df = 12$, $p < .000$). The majority of the ads (70.4%, $n = 3,487$) across all cities did not offer the descriptions of providers at all, offering full description of the providers in 14.1% of ads ($n = 697$). Only 3.2% of ads ($n = 159$) reported parameters of providers for chest/waist/hips respectively.

Escort Service Provider's Nationality. Ads from New York and San Francisco emphasized nationality and race of the providers more than ads from Atlanta and Chicago (56% and 48% of ads vs. 26.7% and 30.5% of ads). More than half of personals for four cities (58.8%) did not specify any useful information related to the nationality of the escort service providers mentioned in personals ($\chi^2 = 307.550$, $df = 12$, $p < .000$).

Escort Service Provider's Business Attitude/Character. Online personals posted in Chicago and San Francisco boasted the largest numbers of independent escorts: 13.3% and 11.6% respectively, in comparison to 9% and 10.7% of the ads in New York and

Atlanta. The self-proclaimed "sexiest" providers live in New York (32.4%); the most sweet-natured providers live in San Francisco (17.5%); and the most "freaky" providers live in Atlanta (10%). A total of 13.1% of ads ($n = 651$) emphasized "girl next door" or "sweet" qualities of escort service providers across four cities. More than forty percent (41.6%, $n = 2,064$) of all personals across four cities did not specify any information related to the provider's character ($\chi^2 = 114.839$, $df = 12$, $p < .000$).

Appearance of the Escort Service Provider

As presented in the discussion on clearance policies, the posters must not post any content that might jeopardize the well-being of another human being. Additionally, posters should be of age to post ads. The frequencies for the categories related to clearance policies listed in Table 4.5 will provide answers to the following research questions:

RQ1c: What are the demographic characteristics of providers portrayed in escort service advertisements?

Escort Service Provider's Perceived Age. San Francisco had the most providers who appeared to be under 13 years old (5.9%), followed by Chicago (5.1%), Atlanta (5%), and New York (2.8%). Approximately one fifth of personals for all cities but New York contained photos of escort service providers who appeared to be 25 years of age or older ($\chi^2 = 171.862$, $df = 12$, $p < .000$). A total of 2,298 ads (46.3%) featured under-age providers: 227 providers who were under 13, and 2,071 provider who appeared to be 13-17 years old.

Escort Service Provider's Race. Race of providers was determined by judging their physical appearance. The racial distribution of providers across four cities was 34.2%

Caucasian, 10.9% Hispanic, 30.7% African-American, 14.3% Asian, and 10% multi-racial ($M = 2.55$, $SD = 1.351$).

As demonstrated in Table 4.4, personals posted in Atlanta featured African-American more than Caucasian providers (55.5% vs. 27%). Generally, Atlanta had the highest proportion of ads posted by Blacks in comparison to other cities, i.e., New York (24.4%), Chicago (31.9%), and San Francisco (14.5%). The highest proportion of ads featuring Caucasians was observed in Chicago (40.9%) and San Francisco (38%). The highest proportion of personals featuring Asian escorts was observed in New York (22.2%) and San Francisco (20.7%). Also, New York and San Francisco had the most ads posted by or on behalf of Hispanic escort service providers, i.e., 15.9% and 11.7% respectively ($\chi^2 = 717.670$, $df = 15$, $p < .000$).

Because the content provides a basis for making judgments about personals, the next two research questions on legality and clearance compliance are closely connected with it:

RQ2: Is there an association between legality of the ads and advertising appeals?

RQ3: How does the content of online personals correspond to clearance policies of the media? Do online personals violate the media's clearance policies?

Escort Service Provider's Dress. Almost one third of all providers across four cities were suggestively clad (27.9%, $n = 1381$). Slightly more than half was partially clad (58%, $n = 2,873$). The photos of nude providers were rare, accounting only for 8.2% of ads. As for fully dressed providers, ads in Atlanta and Chicago featured them the most, i.e., 5.7% and 5.3% respectively ($\chi^2 = 34.064$, $df = 12$, $p < .001$). Across four cities, nude providers were featured in 404 ads (8.2%).

Eye Contact. Providers from New York, Chicago, and San Francisco had eye contact with the viewer in 29.7%, 34.3%, and 39.4% of ads respectively; in comparison, only 27.1% of the advertisements featured escort service providers having eye contact in Atlanta ($\chi^2 = 87.050$, $df = 6$, $p < .000$). Generally, providers from New York and Atlanta had no eye contact with the viewer (69.3% and 68.7% of ads) compared to providers from Chicago and San Francisco, who had no eye contact with viewers in 63% and 56.1% of ads respectively.

Demeanor of the Escort Service Provider

The next subsection will report characteristics of the categories used in the content analysis to explore demeanor of the providers (see Table 4.6).

Escort Service Provider's Face Expression. It was impossible to see the expression of the providers on half of the ads in all cities (52.3%). The flirtiest providers were featured in the ads of New York (32.9%), Chicago (35.6%), and San Francisco (38.2%), whereas providers from Atlanta looked flirty in 29.4% of ads ($\chi^2 = 97.036$, $df = 9$, $p < .000$).

Posture of the Escort Service Provider. Standing posture was the most favorite for providers from all cities, accounting for 36.8% of ads. The second most popular posture was sitting; it accounted for 18.1% of ads ($\chi^2 = 136.214$, $df = 15$, $p < .000$).

Escort Service Provider's Face Visibility. In comparison to other cities, providers in New York were usually featured with their face either visible (37.8%) or not (48.5%), only in 12.9% of the ads their face was half visible. The technique of hiding half of the face was observed in the ads for Atlanta (20.5%), Chicago (20%), and San Francisco (20.9%). The provider's face was visible in 35.5%, 45.5%, and 48.5% of ads in Atlanta, Chicago, and San Francisco ($\chi^2 = 165.040$, $df = 9$, $p < .000$). Overall, 41.8% of ads ($n = 2,070$)

featured providers with their faces fully visible; in 18.3% ($n = 905$) of ads faces of providers were half visible.

Escort Service Provider's Body Visibility. Featuring the torso of a provider was a popular technique in Chicago (12.1%) and San Francisco (12.2%); in comparison, only 6.5% and 8.6% of ads used it in New York and Atlanta respectively. Cropping parts of the body was the most popular technique observed in advertisements across four cities; a total of 57.8% ($n = 2,867$) of ads employed it. Showing the full body was the second most popular technique; a total of 28.7% of ads used it. The ads from New York and Atlanta contained photos with cropped parts of the body in 62.8% and 59.5% cases, in comparison to the ads from Chicago and San Francisco that displayed cropped parts of the body in 53.6% and 54.8% of cases respectively ($\chi^2 = 60.634$, $df = 12$, $p < .000$).

Escort Service Provider's Licensed Withdrawal. In the ads where the face of the provider was visible, the providers frequently looked asleep and unaware of their surroundings in Atlanta (19.6%), Chicago (19.5%), and San Francisco (20.5%). Ads in New York featured providers withdrawn the least, only in 12.6% of escort services advertisements ($\chi^2 = 94.649$, $df = 6$, $p < .000$).

Sexual Demeanor of the Escort Service Provider

The frequencies and proportions for relationships between variables comprising sexual demeanor of the providers for four cities are listed in Table 4.7.

Escort Service Provider's Sexual Look. Providers with their legs spread were featured more in ads for New York (28.7%) than in ads for any other city. Touching parts of the body was a widely employed sexual tactic across four cities: it was employed by 35% of

ads in New York, 32.5% of ads in Atlanta, 37.5% of ads in Chicago, and 42% of ads in San Francisco ($\chi^2 = 146.087$, $df = 12$, $p < .000$).

Escort Service Provider's Sexual Exposure. Ads for New York, Chicago, and San Francisco tended to feature providers' breasts more (34.6%, 33.1%, and 38.7% respectively) than ads for Atlanta (24.7%). Exposure of genitalia and breasts was rare across four cities. New York ads did not feature providers exposing genitalia and breasts at all, whereas Atlanta, Chicago, and San Francisco featured them in .1%, .2, and .1% of the ads respectively. New York ads featured the buttocks of providers in 32.2% of cases (the most); in comparison, San Francisco ads did it only in 16.1% of the cases (the least).

Out of 4,956 total ads across four cities, only 4 ads (.1%) portrayed providers with their genitalia and breasts exposed and only 22 ads (.4%) portrayed providers exposing their genitalia. These ads were not removed from the site despite *Backpage* claiming to check all published ads and having a department tasked with performing those checks on a daily basis ($\chi^2 = 162.278$, $df = 12$, $p < .000$).

Escort Service Provider's Sexual Action. Even though rare, photos of providers massaging themselves were more frequent in New York and Chicago (2.8% and 3.8% of the ads) than in Atlanta (2.2%) and San Francisco (2.5%). A total of .5%, $n = 23$ featured providers in postures similar to kissing. More than half of the ads (56%) invite the viewers of to act sexually, with New York ads doing it the most in 942 out of 1,440 advertisements ($\chi^2 = 111.823$, $df = 15$, $p < .000$).

The crosstabs that follow elaborate on the relationships between the variables involved in the processes of ad content making and media clearance: 1) Listed Age of the

Escort Service Provider by Escort Service Provider's Perceived Age, and 2) Escort Service Provider's Dress by Escort Service Provider's Face Visibility.

Listed Age of the Provider by Provider's Perceived Age

A total of 46% ($n = 2,292$)^{xi} ads featured providers whose listed age was above their perceived age ($\chi^2 = 1066.599$, $df = 144$, $p < .000$). The biggest discrepancy between the two was in San Francisco ads (14%, $n = 674$). New York, Atlanta, and Chicago featured escort service providers whose perceived age was below their listed age in 11% ($n = 546$), 10% ($n = 497$), and 12% ($n = 575$) of the escort services advertisements online ($\chi^2 = 413.031$, $df = 128$, $p < .000$).

Escort Service Provider's Dress by Escort Service Provider's Face Visibility

The majority of ads in New York featured partially clad and suggestively clad providers in 60.6% ($n = 872$) and 28.5% ($n = 410$) of the escort services advertisements respectively ($\chi^2 = 49.615$, $df = 12$, $p < .000$). Of the ads featuring partially clad providers, 66% ($n = 461$) featured providers whose faces were self-censored. Similarly, the majority of providers in advertisements in San Francisco was partially clad and suggestively clad: 59.6% ($n = 701$) and 25.2% ($n = 296$). Of those advertisements, 69.7% ($n = 251$) and 17.2% ($n = 62$) featured self-censored faces of providers ($\chi^2 = 42.291$, $df = 12$, $p < .000$). Generally, partially clad providers accounted for more than 55% of any city's personals. Table 4.8 presents the comparative results for dress of providers and their face visibility for four cities.

Only four ads featured fully dressed providers with half visible faces in New York (.2% out of 1,440); thirty-one ads featured fully dressed providers with their faces entirely visible or not visible at all ($n = 13$, $\chi^2 = 49.615$, $df = 12$, $p < .000$). As to the fully

dressed providers in San Francisco, six ads featured them with their faces half visible (.5% out of 1,176), forty ads portrayed providers with their faces visible, and eight ads featured them with their faces hidden ($\chi^2 = 42.291$, $df = 12$, $p < .000$). Self-censorship of the face in the fully dressed category was the most prominent in Atlanta: thirteen ads (1.2% out of 1,080), thirty-seven, and ten online escort service advertisements featured escort service providers with their faces half visible, fully visible, or not visible respectively ($\chi^2 = 68.120$, $df = 12$, $p < .000$).

Regarding the portrayals of nudity, New York had only 25 ads featuring nude providers without self-censorship tactics applied to the area of the photo with the face (1.7% out of 1,440), 62 ads with faces of providers hidden, and 12 ads where faces of providers were half visible ($\chi^2 = 49.615$, $df = 12$, $p < .000$). In comparison, San Francisco had 49 ads (4.1% out of 1,176), 35 ads, and 23 online advertisements featuring nude escort service providers whose faces were visible, not visible, or half visible respectively ($\chi^2 = 42.291$, $df = 12$, $p < .000$).

To see self-sexualization and objectification in online personals, comparative analyses of Escort Service Provider's Race- by Escort Service Provider's Body Visibility and by Escort Service Provider's Sexual Exposure were conducted.

Escort Service Provider's Body Visibility by Escort Service Provider's Race

Black providers of sexual services cropped their bodies in 33.4% ($n = 959$) of the ads, whereas Caucasian providers cropped their photos in 30.5% ($n = 875$) of the advertisements. Hispanic, Asian, and mixed escort service providers cropped their bodies in 11.6% ($n = 333$), 14.5% ($n = 416$), and 9.9% ($n = 283$) escort service advertisements

respectively ($\chi^2 = 86.613$, $df = 20$, $p < .000$). This relationship was significant for all cities, except Atlanta.

Escort Service Provider's Sexual Exposure by Escort Service Provider's Race

Black providers showed their buttocks more often than providers of any other race: in 42.6% of ads ($n = 519$), in comparison to 28.7% ($n = 349$) of ads for Caucasians, 13.3% ($n = 162$) of ads for Hispanics, and 9.9% of ads ($n = 120$) for providers of mixed race. Asians showed their buttocks the least: 5.4% ($n = 66$). Caucasian providers showed their breasts more often than providers of any other race: 34% ($n = 557$), in comparison to 23.3% ($n = 381$) of Blacks, and 23.5% ($n = 385$) of Asians. It should be noted that Hispanic and mixed providers showed their breasts the least: 10.6% ($n = 173$) and 8.6% ($n = 141$) respectively ($\chi^2 = 304.259$, $df = 20$, $p < .000$).

Table 4.9 provides a detailed report of the visual sexual imagery in online personals and frequencies for sexually stimulating elements represented by the variables of Escort Service Provider's Sexual Exposure, Escort Service Provider's Sexual Look, Escort Service Provider's Sexual Action, and Escort Service Provider's Dress.

Informational and Transformational Content in Personals

To reflect key relationships between advertising appeals and self-censorship tactics in online personals, this section constructs a composite template reflecting the content of online ads for major cities of the United States. As presented in the discussion on advertising appeals in the literature review, the relationships between the use of informational and transformational advertising depend on the type of service or product advertised. To explore the nature of ad appeals, the following research questions were asked:

RQ4: Where in the informational/transformational theoretical framework do the ads fall?

RQ5: What is the role of sexual appeal in escort services advertising? Accounting for the role of sexual appeal in advertising of escort services, how is the framework for informational and transformational advertising used to elaborate on legality of and clearance policies applied to online personals?

In an effort to better understand interrelationships at the intersections of advertising and clearance policies, appropriate categories of content analysis used in this study (see Table 3.2) were grouped into two divisions in accordance with the definitions of ad appeals provided by Swaminathan et al. (1996).

As noted in the literature review, it was difficult to determine if an ad only contained an informational or transformational appeal. Therefore, variables were recoded to reflect both types of appeals emerged so that indications of primarily transformational and informational appeals could be identified. For example, recoding the variable of Escort Service Provider's Professional Philosophy resulted in singling out the variable of Elite Status of Service, which belongs to the transformational category, because it reflects high status of service and appeals to consumers whose consumption is conspicuous. Detailed percentages for the informational/transformational content of online personals is presented in Tables 4.10, 4.11, and 4.12.

Generally, online personals exhibiting features of legality and clearance compliance relied more on informational than transformational cues. The exception, however, was personals posted on behalf of the providers that contained disclaimers and prices, while also featuring sexually-dressed minors. The pattern was observed when

observing online personals exhibiting features of legality and professionalism that also relied more on informational than transformational cues.

Exceptions in both cases relied on transformational and informational cues equally: The majority of ads was posted on behalf of providers (540 out of 562 ads posted on behalf of providers, or 10.9% of a total number of ads) contained disclaimers (275 ads out of 302 ads having disclaimer or 5.5% of total number of ads) and mentions of prices (1,564 ads out of 1,658 ads listing prices, 32% of a total number of ads), while portraying suggestively/partially clad/nude minors (2,169 out of 2,298 ads portraying minors, 43.8% of total number of ads). At the same time, online personals exhibiting features of clearance compliance and professionalism relied more on transformational than informational advertising appeals, with the exception of self-censored personals or personals that employed cropping techniques featuring providers in specific postures.

Escort Service Provider's Perceived Age by Escort Service Provider's Nationality

The nationality of the escort service provider was emphasized in the ads published in New York and San Francisco (see Table 4.13). A total of 56% ($n = 807$) advertisements for New York emphasized nationality ($\chi^2 = 28.310$, $df = 4$, $p < .000$). Similarly, 48% ($n = 565$) of escort service providers who posted photos in San Francisco emphasized nationality as well ($\chi^2 = 41.810$, $df = 4$, $p < .000$).

Among personals from four cities for the category of providers under 13 years old, posters from New York emphasized their nationality in 72.5% of the ads. In comparison, only 40.7%, 39.1%, and 59.4% of providers emphasized nationality in Atlanta, Chicago, and San Francisco. A similar pattern is observed for providers belonging to the 13-17 year-old category: posters from New York emphasized the

nationality in 60.7% of the ads. In comparison, only 31.7%, 36.7%, and 55.4% of the ads placed emphasis on the nationality in Atlanta, Chicago, and San Francisco. A similar trend is observed by looking at the providers who appeared to be 18-24 years-old: posters in New York emphasized nationality in 56.4% of ads, whereas posters in Atlanta, Chicago, and San Francisco emphasized it in 22.1%, 26.8%, and 40.6% of ads respectively (see Table 4.13).

Escort Service Provider's Perceived Age by Variety of Services

The relationship between perceived age of the provider and variety of sex-related services was only significant for New York, the city with the highest number of fetish offers. Escort service providers of 18-25 years of age in New York promised fetish service in 52.7% ($n = 135$) of ads, as opposed to providers under 13 years old who offered it in .4% ($n = 1$) of ads ($\chi^2 = 52.444$, $df = 8$, $p < .000$). The second highest number of fetish offers was significantly lower than that of New York, i.e., 41.3% ($n = 57$) of ads promised fetish services and were posted by providers aged from 13 to 17 in San Francisco. However, this relationship was not significant.

Escort Service Provider's Nationality by Elite Status of Service

As international centers of cultural life close to the east and west coast (this geographic positioning allows these cities to maintain steady influx of tourists from Europe and Asia), San Francisco and New York were the only cities where the relationship between the status of services and their nationality was significant. New York providers posted 67.1% ($n = 155$) of ads noting their nationality and elite status of services ($\chi^2 = 13.657$, $df = 1$, $p < .000$). San Francisco providers posted the second largest number of ads that did the same (38.4%, $n = 43$) ($\chi^2 = 4.619$, $df = 1$, $p < .032$).

Escort Service Provider's Description by Promise of Satisfaction

The relationship between describing a provider and promising satisfaction was only significant for San Francisco ($\chi^2 = 27.854$, $df = 8$, $p < .001$). This could be a consequence of San Francisco having the highest number of ads with all information about providers (20.3%, $n = 239$) and the lowest number of ads with no description of providers 63.7% ($n = 749$). Conversely, Atlanta had the highest number of advertisements (74.3%, $n = 802$) without descriptions ($\chi^2 = 75.436$, $df = 12$, $p < .000$).

Escort Service Provider's Description by Variety of Services

Providers of New York and San Francisco supplied information about themselves more often than providers in other cities. As to New York, its ads had the highest number of massage services in comparison to other cities; this fact could impact the diversity of the services: 118 out of 1,440 ads for New York (8.1%) had massage offerings. In comparison, only 60 out of 1,080 ads (5.6%), 86 out of 1,260 (6.8%), and 53 out of 1,176 ads (4.5%) had massage offerings for Atlanta, Chicago, and San Francisco respectively ($\chi^2 = 131.927$, $df = 9$, $p < .000$). Also, the ads for New York mentioned availability of fetish services in 17.8% ($n = 256$) cases, in comparison to ads in San Francisco that mentioned it in 11.7% ($n = 138$) of cases. It should be noted that Chicago ads had the highest number of offers for fetish services: 22.4%, $n = 282$.

Interestingly, out of those ads for New York that mentioned availability of fetish services, 22.9% ($n = 39$) provided all information about escort service providers as opposed to 17.1% ($n = 179$) of ads without any description ($\chi^2 = 27.730$, $df = 8$, $p < .000$). In comparison, only 5.4% ($n = 3$) of ads offering fetish services in San Francisco

mentioned all information about the provider as opposed to 14.3% ($n = 107$) of ads offering no description at all ($\chi^2 = 37.257$, $df = 12$, $p < .000$).

Escort Service Provider's Nationality by Personal Ad Self-Censorship

The relationship between nationality of the provider and self-censorship was significant for New York and San Francisco only. When posting ads, providers who emphasized nationality used self-censorship to hide their faces in 49.1% ($n = 396$) and 41.2% ($n = 233$) of ads in New York and San Francisco respectively.

Escort Service Provider's Perceived Age by Personal Ad Self-Censorship

Table 4.14 presents frequencies and proportions of self-censorship techniques partitioned by age categories for four cities. When featuring providers who appeared to be under the age of 13, posters from San Francisco used techniques to hide half of the provider's face the most (29%), in comparison to the posters in New York (20%), Atlanta (22.2%), and Chicago (18.8%). As to using techniques of digital distortion to hide the face entirely, New York and Chicago had the most. Posters from New York self-censored their entire faces in 75% and half of the face in 20% of the advertisements ($\chi^2 = 28.230$, $df = 12$, $p < .005$). A similar pattern is evident when examining self-censorship techniques used by posters in Chicago, who self-censored their entire faces in 65.6% and half of the face in 18.8% of the ads ($\chi^2 = 44.990$, $df = 12$, $p < .000$). Only 5% and 14.1% of ads for providers in this category were not distorted (New York and Chicago); in comparison to 33.3% and 50.7% of the ads without self-censorship that were posted in Atlanta and San Francisco.

Looking only at providers who appeared to be from 13 to 17 years old, 51.4% and 49% of posters from New York and Atlanta self-censored the entire face. In comparison,

43.4% and 36.2% of posters from Chicago and San Francisco did the same. For this age category, a total of 36.8% and 40.2% of ads for New York and Atlanta were not self-censored, in comparison to a total of 42.2% and 45.2% of ads for Chicago and San Francisco.

When featuring providers who appeared to be from 18 to 24 years old, the proportion of photos without self-censorship in San Francisco was equal to 52.1%. It was the only city where the increase of the perceived age of the providers was followed by a decrease in self-censorship. In other cities (if compared to self-censorship of photos in previous age category), self-censorship of the photos increased, with posters publishing ads without self-censorship techniques only in 33.5%, 30.5%, and 37.1% of cases in New York, Atlanta, and Chicago respectively.

Finally, when featuring providers who appeared to be 25 years old and above, New York and Atlanta took the lead in posting ads where the faces of providers were completely hidden: 51.7% and 59% of the ads respectively. In comparison, posters in Chicago and San Francisco chose to self-censor faces in 44.5% and 33.9% of ads.

Personal Ad Self-Censorship by Escort Service Provider's Sexual Exposure

More than forty percent of ads for all cities included photos of providers with visible breasts, i.e., 44.4% ($n = 221$) in New York, 41.9% ($n = 112$) in Atlanta, 45.8% ($n = 191$) in Chicago, and 48.8% ($n = 220$) in San Francisco. Relationships for all cities differed significantly.

Personal Ad Self-Censorship by Escort Service Provider's Sexual Look

Forty-seven percent ($n = 237$) of ads in San Francisco featuring providers with their faces half visible and touching their bodies comprised the largest proportion of ads

for these variables. New York had the second largest proportion, with 42.9% ($n = 206$) of ads featuring photos without self-censorship and providers touching their bodies.

Significant differences were reported for all cities.

Personal Ad Self-Censorship by Promise Satisfaction

Providers in Chicago who did not use any self-censorship tactics to hide their faces promised satisfaction most often (53.4%, $n = 261$), whereas providers from San Francisco who did not hide their faces promised it the least (29.9%, $n = 171$). Ads from providers promising satisfaction whose faces were hidden accounted for 32.5% ($n = 245$) in New York, 45.9% ($n = 267$) in Chicago, and 27.4% ($n = 114$) in San Francisco. The relationship was significant for all cities but Atlanta.

Personal Ad Self-Censorship by Variety of Services

The highest number of posters offering fetish services used self-censorship to hide their faces in ads in New York (48.4%, $n = 124$). The second highest number of posters offering fetish services used no self-censorship tactics in advertisements in San Francisco (50.7%, $n = 70$). However, only relationships for the ads in New York City were significant ($\chi^2 = 36.157$, $df = 6$, $p < .000$).

Personal Ad Self-Censorship by Escort Service Provider's Dress

A detailed breakdown for Personal Ad Self-Censorship and Escort Service Provider's Dress can be seen in Table 4.15. Given the purpose of self-censorship to hide any unlawful activities or identity of the provider, those ads featuring fully dressed providers contained more photos with no distortions than those featuring partially or suggestively clad providers: 54.2% (New York), 66.1% (Atlanta), 71.6% (Chicago), and

68.5% (San Francisco). Conversely, there were more photos that featured nude providers with digital distortions than photos that did not have any across four cities.

Regarding portrayals of nudity and the use of self-censorship techniques (100 ads out of 1,440 for New York), the face of providers was entirely hidden in 63% ads; no self-censorship technique was applied to any part of the body in the photo in 20% of the ads. Half-face was self-censored in 17% of the ads ($\chi^2 = 43.435$, $df = 12$, $p < .000$). Out of 104 ads portraying nudity (from the sample of 1,080 for Atlanta), 30.8% featured no self-censorship, and 63.5% self-censored the entire face. Half-face was visible in 5.8% of the ads ($\chi^2 = 65.730$, $df = 12$, $p < .000$).

The largest number of ads portraying nudity without self-censorship of the face was in San Francisco: 46.7% or 50 out of 107 ads portrayed nudity within the sample of 1,176 ads. In four cities, a very small portion of posters published ads that featured self-censored genitalia. Interestingly, only in Chicago and San Francisco did the photos featuring nude providers also feature exposed genitalia: 1.1% and .9% of the ads respectively. All relationships were statistically significant.

Table 4.1.

Features of the Online Personals by City

Variables	City									
	New York		Atlanta		Chicago		San Francisco		Total	
	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>
Personal Ad Frame: How is the photo framed?										
Front view	31.6	455	32.9	355	40.5	510	43.5	512	37.0	1,832
Rear view	15.5	223	15.2	164	9.7	122	5.9	69	11.7	578
Side view	52.9	762	51.9	561	49.8	628	50.6	595	51.4	2,546
Total	100.0	1,440	100.0	1,080	100.0	1,260	100.0	1,176	100.0	4,956
$\chi^2 = 103.160, df = 6, p < .000$										
Personal Ad Self-Censorship: Was the ad self-censored?										
Half of the face is not visible	13.9	200	10.8	117	14.6	184	15.9	187	13.9	688
Breasts blurred	.3	5	.1	1	.4	5	.0	0	.2	11
Genitals blurred	.0	0	.0	0	.0	.0	.2	2	.0	2
The entire face is not visible	52.4	755	54.0	583	46.2	582	35.4	416	47.1	2,336
Not self-censored	33.3	480	35.1	379	38.8	489	48.6	571	38.7	1,919
Total	100.0	1,440	100.0	1,080	100.0	1,260	100.0	1,176	100.0	4,956
$\chi^2 = 121.658, df = 12, p < .000$										
Escort Services Availability: Does an ad provide services for clients of a particular race only?										
Yes	1.7	25	6.9	75	8.5	107	2.3	27	4.7	234
No	98.3	1,415	93.1	1,005	91.5	1,153	97.7	1,149	95.3	4,722
Total	100.0	1,440	100.0	1,080	100.0	1,260	100.0	1,176	100.0	4,956
$\chi^2 = 95.592, df = 3, p < .000$										

Table 4.2.

Features of the Escort Service

Variables	City							
	New York		Atlanta		Chicago		San Francisco	
	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>
Escort Service Location: What is the location of the service?								
In-call	34.4	496	23.4	253	25.1	316	9.7	114
Out-call	22.4	322	14.9	161	20.9	263	29.9	352
In-call& Out-call	11.8	170	18.1	196	19.8	250	23.2	273
Not Applicable	31.4	452	43.5	470	34.2	431	37.2	437
$\chi^2 = 304.485, df = 9, p < .000$								
Escort Service Provider's Professional Philosophy: How good is the service?								
Disclaimer about sex solicitation	4.5	65	12.8	138	5.9	74	2.1	25
Emphasis on the skills	13.5	195	19.1	206	21.1	266	24.1	284
Reviews from previous satisfied clients	1.5	21	5.7	62	6.5	82	3.8	45
Elite positioning of the service	16.0	231	4.1	44	9.4	118	9.5	112
Not Applicable	64.4	928	58.3	630	57.1	720	60.4	710
$\chi^2 = 301.087, df = 12, p < .000$								
Contact and Billing Information: Are there any mentions of price? Contact?								
Methods of Contact	70.8	1,019	54.0	583	62.1	783	76.5	900
Methods of Contact/Payment	29.2	421	46.0	497	36.8	464	23.5	276
$\chi^2 = 186.989, df = 9, p < .000$								
Reassurance of Clients: Does the ad provide reassurance to the client?								
An invitation to call	1.6	23	.5	5	1.2	15	1.2	14
A promise of offering no drama, no games	16.3	235	28.4	307	32.3	407	19.2	226
Not Applicable	82.1	1,182	71.1	768	66.5	838	79.6	936
$\chi^2 = 126.685, df = 6, p < .000$								
Promise of Satisfaction: Is there a promise to fulfill one's desires?								
Yes	39.1	563	33.4	361	51.7	652	27.9	328
No	60.9	877	65.4	706	48.3	608	69.3	815
$\chi^2 = 220.407, df = 6, p < .000$								
Variety of Services: Is there an opportunity to choose some special services?								
Yes, fetish services available	17.8	256	17.9	193	22.4	282	11.7	138
No	74.0	1,066	75.7	818	70.8	892	81.2	955
Massage service offered	8.2	118	5.6	60	6.8	86	4.5	53
$\chi^2 = 131.927, df = 9, p < .000$								

Table 4.3.

"Code of Honor" for Clients

Variables	City									
	New York		Atlanta		Chicago		San Francisco		Total	
	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>
Escort Service Discretion: Is there a requirement to be discrete?										
Yes	13.5	194	18.3	198	19.0	239	12.6	148	15.7	779
No	86.5	1,246	81.7	882	81.0	1,021	87.4	1,028	84.3	4,177
Total	100.0	1,440	100.0	1,080	100.0	1,260	100.0	1,176	100.0	4,956
$\chi^2 = 29.819, df = 3, p < .000$										
Client Conduct: Is there a requirement to be courteous?										
Yes, serious clients only	7.6	109	12.1	131	11.5	145	6.0	70	9.2	455
No	76.0	1,095	67.2	726	66.4	837	79.5	935	72.5	3,593
No blocked calls	12.0	173	13.0	140	15.9	200	11.5	135	13.1	648
Serious clients only and no block calls	4.4	63	7.7	83	6.2	78	3.1	36	5.2	260
Total	100.0	1,440	100.0	1,080	100.0	1,260	100.0	1,176	100.0	4,956
$\chi^2 = 94.353, df = 9, p < .000$										

Table 4.4.

Escort Service Provider's Description

Variables	City							
	New York		Atlanta		Chicago		San Francisco	
	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>
Multiple Escort Service Providers: Are there several girls advertised?								
Yes	29.9	431	16.8	181	16.0	202	6.7	79
No	70.1	1,009	83.2	899	84.0	1,058	93.3	1,097
$\chi^2 = 244.521, df = 6, p < .000$								
Posting Ads on behalf of Providers: Does it look like an ad for an agency?								
Yes	24.5	353	7.0	76	6.0	75	4.9	58
No	75.5	1,087	93.0	1,004	94.0	1,185	95.1	1,118
$\chi^2 = 352.873, df = 3, p < .000$								
Escort Service Provider's Description: Are there any measurements of the provider listed?								
No description	72.8	1,049	74.3	802	70.4	887	63.7	749
Bust/cup size	3.3	48	2.9	31	3.5	44	3.1	36
Height/weight information	5.2	75	6.1	66	4.5	57	3.7	43
Hair/eyes color	6.8	98	6.0	65	7.9	100	9.3	109
All information above	11.8	170	10.7	116	13.7	172	20.3	239
$\chi^2 = 75.436, df = 12, p < .000$								
Escort Service Provider's Nationality: Is nationality/race of the provider emphasized?								
Emphasized	56.0	807	26.7	288	30.5	384	48.0	565
Not emphasized	44.0	633	73.3	792	69.5	876	52.0	611
$\chi^2 = 307.550, df = 12, p < .000$								
Escort Service Provider's Business Attitude/Character: What is the business attitude of the provider? Self-description?								
Independent	9.0	129	10.7	116	13.3	167	11.6	137
Gorgeous, sexy	32.4	466	21.6	233	28.3	357	26.6	313
"Girl next door," fun to be around, sweet	13.1	188	9.9	107	11.9	150	17.5	206
Freaky, dirty sexy	6.9	100	10.0	108	5.6	71	3.7	44
$\chi^2 = 114.839, df = 12, p < .000$								

Table 4.5.

Appearance of the Escort Service Provider

Variables	City							
	New York		Atlanta		Chicago		San Francisco	
	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>
Escort Service Provider's Perceived Age: How old is the provider appear to be?								
Up to 13	2.8	40	5.0	54	5.1	64	5.9	69
13-17	35.1	506	41.2	445	40.6	512	51.7	608
18-25	44.1	635	31.9	344	30.8	388	22.2	261
25 and above	16.8	242	20.1	217	22.5	283	19.0	224
$\chi^2 = 171.862, df = 12, p < .000$								
Escort Service Provider's Race: What race does the provider appear to belong to?								
Caucasian	30.5	439	27.0	292	40.9	515	38.0	447
Hispanic/Latina	15.9	229	5.6	60	8.8	111	11.7	138
Black	24.4	351	55.5	599	31.9	402	14.5	170
Asian	22.2	320	2.7	29	9.1	115	20.7	243
Mixed	7.0	101	9.3	100	9.2	116	15.1	178
$\chi^2 = 717.670, df = 15, p < .000$								
Escort Service Provider's Dress: What dress is the provider wearing?								
Fully dressed	3.3	48	5.7	62	5.3	67	4.6	54
Suggestively clad	28.5	410	27.5	297	30.0	378	25.2	296
Partially clad	60.6	872	55.3	597	55.8	703	59.6	701
Nude	6.9	100	9.6	104	7.4	93	9.1	107
Not Applicable	.7	10	1.9	20	1.5	19	1.5	18
$\chi^2 = 34.064, df = 12, p < .001$								
Eye Contact: Is there any eye contact with the viewer of the personals?								
Yes	29.7	428	27.1	293	34.3	432	39.4	463
No	69.3	998	68.7	742	63.0	794	56.1	660
$\chi^2 = 87.050, df = 6, p < .000$								

Table 4.6.

Demeanor of the Escort Service Provider

Variables	City									
	New York		Atlanta		Chicago		San Francisco		Total	
	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>
Escort Service Provider's Face Expression										
Detached	5.9	85	6.2	67	9.4	119	5.4	63	6.7	334
Engaged	32.9	474	29.4	318	35.6	448	38.2	449	34.1	1,689
Neutral	3.5	50	7.2	78	8.0	101	9.4	111	6.9	340
N/A	57.7	831	57.1	617	47.0	592	47.0	553	52.3	2,593
Total	100.0	1,440	100.0	1,080	100.0	1,260	100.0	1,176	100.0	4,956
$\chi^2 = 97.036, df = 9, p < .000$										
Posture of the Escort Service Provider										
Standing	30.5	439	40.7	440	39.0	492	38.5	453	36.8	1,824
Kneeling	17.3	249	10.5	113	9.9	125	8.6	101	11.9	588
Reclining	13.2	190	7.9	85	9.2	116	5.6	66	9.2	457
Lying	10.3	148	12.0	130	10.7	135	11.9	140	11.2	553
Sitting	18.0	259	16.0	173	17.9	226	20.3	239	18.1	897
N/A	10.8	155	12.9	139	13.2	166	15.1	177	12.9	637
Total	100.0	1,440	100.0	1,080	100.0	1,260	100.0	1,176	100.0	4,956
$\chi^2 = 136.214, df = 15, p < .000$										
Escort Service Provider's Face Visibility										
Yes	37.8	544	35.5	383	45.5	573	48.5	570	41.8	2,070
No	48.5	698	41.6	449	33.1	417	30.6	360	38.8	1,924
Half-face	12.9	186	20.5	221	20.0	252	20.9	246	18.3	905
N/A	.8	12	2.5	27	1.4	18	0.0	0	1.2	57
Total	100.0	1,440	100.0	1,080	100.0	1,260	100.0	1,176	100.0	4,956
$\chi^2 = 165.040, df = 9, p < .000$										
Escort Service Provider's Body Visibility										
Full size	28.4	409	27.2	294	29.6	373	29.4	346	28.7	1,422
Head shot	2.3	33	4.4	48	4.5	57	3.3	39	3.6	177
Torso shot	6.5	94	8.6	93	12.1	153	12.2	143	9.7	483
Cropped	62.8	904	59.5	643	53.6	675	54.8	645	57.8	2,867
Total	100.0	1,440	99.7	1,080	99.8	1,260	99.7	1,176	99.8	4,956
$\chi^2 = 60.634, df = 12, p < .000$										
Escort Service Provider's Licensed Withdrawal										
Yes	12.6	182	19.6	212	19.5	246	20.5	241	17.8	881
No	31.6	455	28.9	312	36.3	457	39.6	466	34.1	1,690
N/A	55.8	803	51.5	556	44.2	557	39.9	469	48.1	2,385
Total	100.0	1,440	100.0	1,080	100.0	1,260	100.0	1,176	100.0	4,956
$\chi^2 = 94.649, df = 6, p < .000$										

Table 4.7.

Sexual Demeanor of the Escort Service Provider

Variables	City							
	New York		Atlanta		Chicago		San Francisco	
	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>
Escort Service Provider's Sexual Look: Is the look of the provider sexually suggestive?								
Half-closed eyes	1.7	25	4.1	44	3.8	48	2.9	34
Half-open lips	6.6	95	5.6	61	7.9	100	7.0	82
Legs spread out	28.7	413	23.1	249	19.2	242	11.6	136
Touching parts of her body	35.0	504	32.5	351	37.5	473	42.0	494
Not Applicable	28.0	403	34.7	375	31.5	397	36.6	430

$$\chi^2 = 146.087, df = 12, p < .000$$

Escort Service Provider's Sexual Exposure: Are there any sexual parts of the body exposed?								
Breasts	34.6	498	24.7	267	33.1	417	38.7	455
Genitalia	.2	3	.6	6	.6	7	.5	6
Buttocks	32.2	464	28.3	306	20.5	258	16.1	189
Breasts and genitalia	.0	0	.1	1	.2	2	.1	1
Not Applicable	33.0	475	46.3	500	45.7	576	41.9	525

$$\chi^2 = 162.278, df = 12, p < .000$$

Escort Service Provider's Sexual Action: Is there any sexual action going on within the photo?								
Massage	2.8	40	2.2	24	3.8	48	2.5	29
Masturbation	.3	5	.1	1	.1	1	.1	1
Touching genitalia	.8	11	.5	5	.6	8	.8	9
Kissing	.4	6	.6	6	.5	6	.4	5
Invitation to sexual action	65.4	942	55.0	594	54.4	685	47.1	554
Not Applicable	30.3	436	41.7	450	40.6	512	49.1	578

$$\chi^2 = 111.823, df = 15, p < .000$$

Table 4.8.

Escort Service Provider's Dress by Escort Service Provider's Face Visibility

City <i>N</i> 4,956	Provider's Dress	Is face of the provider visible?					
		Yes		No		Half visible	
		%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>
New York <i>n</i> 1,440	Fully dressed	5.7	31	1.9	13	2.2	4
	Sexually suggestive	34.6	188	22.6	158	31.7	59
	Partially clad	54.6	297	66.0	461	58.1	108
	Nude	4.6	25	8.9	62	6.5	12

$\chi^2 = 49.615, df = 12, p < .000$

Atlanta <i>n</i> 1,080	Fully dressed	9.7	37	2.2	10	5.9	13
	Sexually suggestive	34.5	132	22.7	102	27.1	60
	Partially clad	44.6	171	61.9	278	59.3	131
	Nude	7.3	28	12.2	55	7.7	17

$\chi^2 = 68.120, df = 12, p < .000$

Chicago <i>n</i> 1,260	Fully dressed	8.4	48	2.2	9	4.0	10
	Sexually suggestive	33.9	194	24.0	100	32.9	83
	Partially clad	48.0	275	66.2	276	55.2	139
	Nude	7.5	43	7.2	30	7.1	18

$\chi^2 = 64.507, df = 12, p < .000$

San Francisco <i>n</i> 1,176	Fully dressed	7.0	40	2.2	8	2.4	6
	Sexually suggestive	28.9	165	17.2	62	28.0	69
	Partially clad	53.2	303	69.7	251	59.8	147
	Nude	8.6	49	9.7	35	9.3	23

$\chi^2 = 42.291, df = 12, p < .000$

Table 4.9.

Visual Sexual Imagery in Online Personals

Variable	Frequency	Percent
<i>Escort Service Provider's Dress</i>		
Suggestively clad	1,381	27.9
Partially clad	2,873	58.0
Nude	404	8.2
Total	4,658 (93.99%)	
<i>Escort Service Provider's Sexual Exposure</i>		
Breasts	1,637	33.0
Genitalia	22	.4
Buttocks	1,217	24.6
Breasts and genitalia	4	.1
Total	2,880 (58.11%)	
<i>Escort Service Provider's Sexual Look</i>		
Half-closed eyes	151	3.0
Half-open lips	338	6.8
Legs spread out	1,040	21.0
Touching parts of the body	1,822	36.8
Total	3,351 (67.61%)	
<i>Escort Service Provider's Sexual Action</i>		
Massage	141	2.8
Masturbation	8	.2
Touching genitalia	33	.7
Kissing	23	.5
Invitation to sexual action	2,775	56.0
Total	2,980 (60.12%)	

Table 4.10.

Informational and Transformational Content (Legality/Clearance)

	Informational		<i>Clearance</i>	Transformational		
	%	<i>n</i>		%	<i>n</i>	
<i>Legality</i>	Anti-Prostitution Disclaimer	6	302	Escort Service Provider's Sexual Exposure	3.4	174
				Escort Service Provider's Action	3.9	196
				Escort Service Provider's Look	4.0	201
				Personal Ad Self-Censorship	4.6	231
				Escort Service Provider's Body Visibility	3.6	182
				Escort Service Provider's Dress	5.5	275
	Billing for Services	33	1,658	Escort Service Provider's Sexual Exposure	20.0	1,004
				Escort Service Provider's Action	20.7	1,040
				Escort Service Provider's Look	22.5	1,130
				Personal Ad Self-Censorship	21.6	1,085
				Escort Service Provider's Body Visibility	19.9	999
				Escort Service Provider's Dress	31.56	1,564
	Escort Service Provider's Perceived Age	46.3	2,298	Escort Service Provider's Sexual Exposure	25.4	1,260
				Escort Service Provider's Action	27.15	1,346
				Escort Service Provider's Look	30.99	1,536
Personal Ad Self-Censorship				27.8	1,378	
Escort Service Provider's Body Visibility				26.95	1,336	
Escort Service Provider's Dress				43.8	2,169	
Escort Service Provider's Agency	11.3	562	Escort Service Provider's Sexual Exposure	7.3	301	
			Escort Service Provider's Action	7.7	381	
			Escort Service Provider's Look	8.3	410	
			Personal Ad Self-Censorship	7.0	345	
			Escort Service Provider's Body Visibility	6.7	333	
			Escort Service Provider's Dress	10.9	540	

*Note.** Percentage figures are calculated based on the total number of ads.

Legality: (1) Anti-Prostitution Disclaimer, (2) Billing for Services, (3) Escort Service Provider's Agency, and (4) Escort Service Provider's Perceived Age.

Featured Clearance Compliance Variables: (1) Escort Service Provider's Sexual Exposure, (2) Escort Service Provider's Sexual Action, (3) Escort Service Provider's Sexual Look, (4) Personal Ad Self-Censorship, (5) Escort Service Provider's Body Visibility, and (6) Escort Service Provider's Dress.

Table 4.11.

Informational and Transformational Content (Legality/Professionalism)

	Informational		Transformational			
	%	<i>n</i>	<i>Professionalism</i>			
			%	<i>n</i>		
<i>Legality</i>	Anti-Prostitution Disclaimer	6	302	Escort Service Provider's Dress	5.5	275
				Service Professionalism Status	N/A	N/A
				Promise of Satisfaction	4.0	123
	Billing for Services	33	1,658	Escort Service Provider's Dress	31.0	1,564
				Service Professionalism Status	3.2	161
				Promise of Satisfaction	13.5	673
	Escort Service Provider's Perceived Age	46.3	2,298	Escort Service Provider's Dress	43.8	2,169
				Service Professionalism Status	4.2	209
				Promise of Satisfaction	15.2	755
	Escort Service Provider's Agency	11.3	562	Escort Service Provider's Dress	10.8	540
				Service Professionalism Status	2.3	114
				Promise of Satisfaction	5.1	253

*Note.** Percentage figures are calculated based on the total number of ads.

Legality: (1) Anti-Prostitution Disclaimer, (2) Billing for Services, (3) Escort Service Provider's Agency, and (4) Escort Service Provider's Perceived Age.

Featured Professionalism Variables: (1) Escort Service Provider's Dress, (2) Service Professionalism (Status), (3) Promise of Satisfaction.

Table 4.12.

Informational and Transformational Content (Clearance/Professionalism)

	Transformational		Professionalism		Informational	
	%	<i>n</i>			%	<i>n</i>
Escort Service Provider's Sexual Exposure	58.11	2,880	Escort Service Availability		2.6	129
			Variety of Services		13.19	654
			Escort Service Discretion		9.4	465
			Client Conduct		16.10	798
			Escort Service Provider's Description		17.8	880
			Escort Service Provider's Posture		45.26	2,243
Escort Service Provider's Dress	94	4,658	Escort Service Availability		4.2	213
			Variety of Services		22.5	1,115
			Escort Service Discretion		14.8	733
			Client Conduct		26.0	1,288
			Escort Service Provider's Description		29.24	1,449
			Escort Service Provider's Posture		83.5	4,138
Escort Service Provider's Body Visibility	58	2,867	Escort Service Availability		2.8	142
			Variety of Services		12.17	603
			Escort Service Discretion		9.0	444
			Client Conduct		16.26	806
			Escort Service Provider's Description		17.15	850
			Escort Service Provider's Posture		52.26	2,590
Personal Ad Self-Censorship	61.3	3,037	Escort Service Availability		3.0	151
			Variety of Services		14.4	716
			Escort Service Discretion		10.2	505
			Client Conduct		17.7	880
			Escort Service Provider's Description		18.32	908
			Escort Service Provider's Posture		55.6	2,756

Note.* Percentage figures are calculated based on the total number of ads.

Featured Clearance Compliance Variables: (1) Escort Service Provider's Sexual Exposure, (2) Escort Service Provider's Dress, (3) Escort Service Provider's Body Visibility, and (4) Personal Ad Self-Censorship.

Featured Professionalism Variables: (1) Escort Services Availability, (2) Variety of Services, (3) Service Discretion, (4) Client Conduct, (5) Escort Service Provider's Description (body measurements), and (6) Escort Service Provider's Posture.

Table 4.13.

Escort Service Provider's Perceived Age by Escort Service Provider's Nationality

City N 4,956	Is nationality of the provider emphasized?	Escort Service Provider's Perceived Age							
		Up to 13		13-17		18-24		25 and above	
		%	n	%	n	%	N	%	n
New York n 1,440	Yes	72.5	29	60.7	307	56.4	358	42.1	102
	No	27.5	11	39.3	199	43.6	277	57.9	140

$$\chi^2 = 28.310, df = 4, p < .000$$

Atlanta n 1,080	Yes	40.7	22	31.7	141	22.1	76	19.4	42
	No	59.3	32	68.3	304	77.9	268	80.6	175

$$\chi^2 = 21.524, df = 4, p < .000$$

Chicago n 1,260	Yes	39.1	25	36.7	188	26.8	104	21.9	62
	No	60.9	39	63.3	324	73.2	284	78.1	221

$$\chi^2 = 24.309, df = 4, p < .000$$

San Francisco n 1,176	Yes	59.4	41	55.4	337	40.6	106	33.5	75
	No	40.6	28	44.6	271	59.4	155	66.5	149

$$\chi^2 = 41.810, df = 4, p < .000$$

Table 4.14.

Escort Service Provider's Perceived Age by Personal Ad Self-Censorship

City N 4,956	Was the photo self-censored by the poster?	Provider's Perceived Age							
		Up to 13		13-17		18-24		25 and above	
		%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
New York n 1,440	Half of the face is not visible	20.0	8	11.7	59	14.8	94	15.3	37
	Breasts blurred	.0	0	.2	1	.3	2	.8	2
	The entire face is not visible	75.0	30	51.4	260	51.3	326	51.7	125
	No self-censorship	5.0	2	36.8	186	33.5	213	32.2	78

$\chi^2 = 28.230, df = 12, p < .005$

Atlanta n 1,080	Half of the face is not visible	22.2	12	10.6	47	11.3	39	7.8	17
	Breasts blurred	.0	0	.2	1	.0	0	.0	0
	The entire face is not visible	44.4	24	49.0	218	58.1	200	59.0	128
	No self-censorship	33.3	18	40.2	179	30.5	105	33.2	72

$\chi^2 = 21.582, df = 12, p < .042$

Chicago n 1,260	Half of the face is not visible	18.8	12	14.1	72	15.5	60	14.1	40
	Breasts blurred	1.6	1	.4	2	.3	1	.0	0
	The entire face is not visible	65.6	42	43.4	222	47.2	183	44.5	126
	No self-censorship	14.1	9	42.2	216	37.1	144	41.3	117

$\chi^2 = 44.990, df = 12, p < .000$

San Francisco n 1,176	Half of the face is not visible	29.0	20	18.3	111	10.7	28	12.1	27
	Genitals blurred	.0	0	.3	2	.0	0	.0	0
	The entire face is not visible	20.3	14	36.2	220	37.2	97	33.9	76
	No self-censorship	50.7	35	45.2	275	52.1	136	54.0	121

$\chi^2 = 31.458, df = 12, p < .002$

Table 4.15.

Personal Ad Self-Censorship by Escort Service Provider's Dress

City <i>N</i> 4,956	Provider's Dress	Was a photo within the ad self-censored?							
		No self-censorship		Half of the face self-censored		The entire face is not visible		Genitalia self-censored	
		%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>
New York <i>n</i> 1,140	Fully dressed	54.2	26	16.7	8	27.1	13	2.1	1
	Sexually suggestive	40.2	165	15.1	62	44.1	181	.5	2
	Partially clad	30.5	266	12.7	111	56.5	493	.2	2
	Nude	20.0	20	17.0	17	63.0	63	.0	0

$$\chi^2 = 43.435, df = 12, p < .000$$

Atlanta <i>n</i> 1,080	Fully dressed	66.1	41	11.3	7	22.6	14	.0	0
	Sexually suggestive	40.7	121	13.8	41	45.1	134	.3	1
	Partially clad	28.8	172	10.2	61	61.0	364	.0	0
	Nude	30.8	32	5.8	6	63.5	66	.0	0

$$\chi^2 = 65.730, df = 12, p < .000$$

Chicago <i>n</i> 1,260	Fully dressed	71.6	48	6.0	4	20.9	14	1.5	1
	Sexually suggestive	42.6	161	18.0	68	38.6	146	.8	3
	Partially clad	33.3	234	13.9	98	52.8	371	.0	0
	Nude	37.6	35	11.8	11	49.5	46	1.1	1

$$\chi^2 = 64.328, df = 12, p < .000$$

San Francisco <i>n</i> 1,176	Fully dressed	68.5	37	3.7	2	27.8	15	.0	0
	Sexually suggestive	56.4	167	17.6	52	26.0	77	.0	0
	Partially clad	43.5	305	16.1	113	40.2	282	.1	1
	Nude	46.7	50	17.8	19	34.6	37	.9	1

$$\chi^2 = 37.730, df = 12, p < .000$$

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Introduction

One of the ways to better understand the controversy regarding the promotion of sex-related services is to look at online personals for escort services as vehicles of social communication, mirroring the issues faced by providers of escort services on social, economic, legal, and clearance compliance levels. The primary motivation of this study was to investigate a paradox at the core of online personals, which sometime market illegal activities by seemingly legal means. Triggered by research exposing prostitution-related personals online, this study set out to explore the content of 4,956 online personals published in *Backpage* "escorts" section in four major U.S. cities from July 2011 to June 2012, relative to clearance policies and U.S. penal codes.

Content analysis of text and visuals conducted here offers findings that run counter to the commonly held beliefs that all online personals promote illegal activities. This study found that posters comply with some media clearance policies (e.g., posting photos without nudity), while transgressing others (e.g., posting photos of underage providers). While some personals do transgress *Backpage* clearance policies and are not removed from the site, a majority of personals abide by them with the exception of policies regarding minors, who were featured in more than half of the personals. As evident from these findings, online personals are complex artifacts, speaking to the promotion of sex-related services, but also raising issues of social justice. They reflect

clients' concerns about quality and legality of services, fears of sex workers disguised as genuine masseuses, hopes of providers marketing legitimate services, and issues of those whose services are promoted against their will.

Given the hostility of public opinion toward online sex-related offers and vague status of massage or escort providers, many legitimate providers face discrimination. At the same time, clients of legitimate services may be frustrated by the difficulties in distinguishing between legitimate and illegal massage or escort service providers. The findings of this study serve to correct exaggerations in prior research. Possibly due to the reputation of sex-related services, researchers may not have looked carefully enough to distinguish the differences between illegal and legal sex-related services. For example, judging from the hotel setting of the photos, Roe-Sepowitz et al. (2012) classified personals as such that promote sex work.

Distinguishing between legal and illegal sex-related services is necessary to provide tools for differentiating human trafficking from prostitution, which is the major challenge faced by the researchers of human trafficking right now (Hughes, cited Latonero et al., 2011, p. 14). Research on human trafficking should address the agency of the escort service provider. Victims of human trafficking have no agency over their actions; they have no choice when it comes to engaging in sexual activity. By contrast, escort service providers and sex workers not only have such a choice, but also benefit from their work financially (Brents, 2008).

Tensility or vagueness of language is inherent to online promotion of controversial services, which only exacerbates the complexity of the legal and social controversies surrounding online personals. Difficulties of content analyzing and coding

sexual content parallel the difficulties of making laws and policies governing online personals. In answering the research questions posed by this study, in the process of content analysis, three indicators of legality, clearance compliance, and professionalism emerged, using those indicators the framework to facilitate objective judgments regarding the content of personals of controversial services was developed. This framework allows for the analysis ad appeals and requirements of penal codes and media clearance policies.

The third indicator, labeled professionalism, is comprised of categories that relate to sex-objectification, which in the case of sex-related services indicates efforts to professionalize. Associated with criminal world, personals shed light on relationships between its constituencies, clients and providers. These relationships are constructed by of providers' outlining responsibilities of clients, clarifying information about availability of service to certain members of the society, standing for various customs of conduct. All of them are at the core of primary organizational principles regarding the industry for sex-related services. The term "professionalism" could be used to suggest the need exhibited by the workers of sex-related services to adhere to some standards of "business conduct," such as detailing responsibilities of clients, clarifying information about service availability.

It is perhaps surprising that "professionalism" was chosen as the label for this indicator. Despite research in a number of disciplines, there is only limited agreement on the qualities that define a "professional" or the use of the term. Certainly, reference to a "professional" is likely to conjure up images of doctors, lawyers, accountants, and the clergy, not providers of sex-related services.

Providers of sex-related services are trapped, both by negative public perceptions toward their trade and its illegality. Given the illegal status of sex work and anything associated with it, sex workers find it necessary to hide their identity, revealing only such information as deemed to be safe. Thus, while it is possible to talk about professionalism in the most recognized sense of the word, when speaking about escort services, providers could relate to what might be called "pseudo-professional" practices, coping mechanisms through which providers attempt to legitimate their trade (Nyilasy, Kreshel, & Reid, 2012, p. 158).

Several elements of "pseudo-professionalism" existed in online personals: (1) reusing the templates for the promotion of services "that worked for others," (2) viewing the clients as partners "in crime," (3) articulating philosophies by mentioning additional features of the services, (4) referencing sources of authority, such as client reviews of their work. Striving for self-identification, providers are developing a special code of conduct that would define the nature of client-provider relationships in the industry.

The following section addresses the research questions posed at the outset of this study.

Content of Online Personals

The overarching concern guiding this research is how illegal activities sometimes get marketed by seemingly legal means. Initially detailing the content of online personals, the first three research questions then probed the content of online personals through the lens of compliance and legality:

RQ1: What is the content of online escort advertising? What are the main attributes mentioned by providers of escort services online?

RQ2: Is there an association between legality of the ads and advertising appeals?

RQ3: How does the content of online personals correspond to clearance policies of the media? Do online personals violate the media's clearance policies?

The section that follows discusses the indicators of legality and clearance compliance, detailing content attributes that define each. The criteria for content analysis of personals for controversial services developed by this study safeguard researchers from making inflated claims. It is difficult to determine why a certain content variable belongs within one indicator and not another. Hence, as is the case for transformational and informational advertising appeals, all variables belonging to indicators described here should be viewed in terms of their "primary" and "secondary" functions.

Legality

The four criteria examined to assess the legality of the personals were: (1) the presence or absence of Anti-Prostitution Disclaimer, (2) Billing for Services, (3) Escort Service Provider's Agency, and (4) Escort Service Provider's Perceived Age. This study found that 302 (6.1%) of ads included anti-prostitution disclaimers, specifying that everything that happens after the initial introductions between a client and an escort provider "happens between two consenting adults."

The primary purpose for inclusion of these disclaimers is to protect posters from legal punishment for prostitution. These disclaimers can also be interpreted as signs of nascent professional tradition in sex-related industries the boundaries of the service.

This study coded all references to the prices of services, including the vague or "coded" references (e.g., 200 roses, 78 petals, 400 flowers per hour). An ad mentioning price does not necessarily suggest prostitution; *Backpage* clearance policies do not

prohibit mentioning prices (except those for less than 60 minutes). Ads mentioning prices did not violate *Backpage* policy, except for a minuscule portion of them that indicated a possibility of "quickies." Even supposing that all ads containing "coded" mentions of price were for prostitution, less than one third of all ads analyzed made references to prices.

The question of a provider's agency becomes important in determining whether the person within the ad is exploited. The presence of any involvement of a third party in promoting the sex-related services offered is indicative of exploitation. The secondary purpose of this category is to see how an escort service works and how it is structured from the industry perspective.

More than half of posts (46%) analyzed here were made by providers of sexual services 17 years of age or younger. In comparison, a study conducted by Roe-Sepowitz et al. (2012) from Arizona State University (ASU) found that less than 5% of personals contained photos of minors on *Backpage* (Roe-Sepowitz et al., 2012). As discussed in the literature review, the study of online personals on *Backpage* conducted at ASU illuminates areas for confusion and potential controversy in regard to what should be considered an advertisement for prostitution. Aimed at detecting personals for prostitution, Roe-Sepowitz et al. (2012) exaggerated numbers of prostitution-related personals, because of the lack of unbiased attributes of prostitution.

Prostitution is a very complex concept. Given that U.S. penal codes' definition of prostitution and its enforcement vary widely, online personals present tensile or ambiguous information. U.S. Penal codes prohibit solicitation for the purposes of sex and pimping; hence, any poster publishing information regarding sex solicitation or offers of

sex work is advertising illegally. Theoretically, such a personal should be removed from *Backpage*; *Backpage's* department of clearance policies monitors the ad content. As a result, many who offer sex work service disguise themselves as escorts and masseuses; however, there are many genuine masseuses as well. By checking the content of personals against U.S. penal codes and media clearance policies, the present study offers a solution to the problem of distinguishing the legal as opposed to illegal offers online.

Clearance Compliance

Eight criteria were coded to determine compliance of the personals with *Backpage's* policies: (1) Billing for Services (< 60 min), (2) Escort Service Provider's Perceived Age, (3) Escort Service Provider's Dress, (4) Escort Service Provider's Body Visibility, (5) Personal Ad Self-Censorship, (6) Escort Service Provider's Sexual Exposure, (7) Escort Service Provider's Sexual Look, and (8) Escort Service Provider's Sexual Action.

U.S. penal codes prohibit sex solicitation in any form, including mentions of price for such services. *Backpage* compliance policy is less stringent; only pricing for under 60 minutes is prohibited. Slightly more than one third of ads (33.5%) analyzed included pricing. This is significantly lower the volume of ads mentioning price reported by Castle and Lee (2008). This maybe due to the differences in media platforms and in posters' usage of tensility tactics. The unwillingness of *Backpage* posters to mention prices might be explained by the fact that sex solicitation is a crime. Posters on specialized escort websites are relatively safe when mentioning the price of services, because these websites are tailored to the needs of escort service providers and their clients.

Reflecting legal status, *Backpage* media clearance policies state that only posters 18 years of age are allowed to post online personals for escort services or to be featured in them. In comparison to an earlier study, which reported only 88 ads out of several thousands (Roe-Sepowitz et al., 2012), more than half of ads in this study would have been reported to the police, because they included minors.

Another criteria of clearance compliance is nudity, which is prohibited by *Backpage*. Consistent with previous findings based on *MySpace* personals and practices of self-sexualization (Hall et al., 2011), escort providers prefer posting photos in which they are partially and suggestively clad (58% and 27.9% respectively). Irrespective of the differences between business platforms of *MySpace*, a social network, and *Backpage*, an online classifieds site, this finding might be explained by posters attempting to attract attention by revealing their bodies. The purpose of personals published on social networking sites is not only to stay in touch (Joinson, 2008), but also to enhance one's attractiveness. By contrast, the purpose of a personal posted on the online classified site is to sell a service. Knowing that choice of clothing impacts the effectiveness of advertising, posters must comply with clearance policies. The majority of ads published on *Backpage* transgress no clearance policies, only 8.2% of ads portrayed nude providers and less than .5% of ads content analyzed by this study portrayed genitalia.

Another criterion, sexual exposure, is coded to assess compliance with clearance policies. The primary purpose of this variable is to capture any violations of U.S. penal codes or clearance policies. Because sexual exposure reflects the desire of self-sexualization, the secondary purpose of this variable is to determine professional qualities of providers.

Few posters violated *Backpage* clearance policies. In attempting to create a professional profile, it is not surprising that posters use self-sexualization practices such as cropping. Posters employ cropping technique more often in online personals on *Backpage* than on *MySpace*. *MySpace* profiles represent profiles of people, whereas the advertisements published in the escort section of *Backpage* represent services directly associated with sex-related activities. Thus, if the ad promotes foot fetishes, it is very likely it will contain cropped photos of the feet. If it promotes BDSM, it will likely include tools for this service pictured alongside the provider. If it promotes companionship of a classy escort provider, it will likely have a photo of a beautiful woman either suggestively or partially clad so that the prospective clients were able to evaluate her body in terms of its suitability for any purpose they might have in mind.

The differences between *MySpace* and *Backpage* business and media platforms speak not only to clearance and legality, but also to provider professionalism. By self-sexualizing themselves in the photos, providers are attempting to create their individual brands. In comparison to alcohol and tobacco advertising using sexual imagery to enhance a product or service^{xii} and posters who use their sexuality in seeking romantic relationships, posters on *Backpage* use sexual imagery because it is an inherent part of their services.

There are racial differences in self-sexualization. Black providers relied on showing their rear areas (e.g., buttocks) more often than providers of other races (43%); however, Caucasians show breasts more often than providers of any other race (34%). Interestingly, the majority of providers preferred posting cropped photos that would conceal their private parts and their identity.

Self-sexualization is closely intertwined with self-censorship and cropping techniques used to hide providers' identity. Because no blurring or pixelization of genitalia or breasts is permitted on *Backpage*, variables for self-censorship and visibility of body were used to judge clearance compliance. More than half of the ads (58%) analyzed included photos in which parts of the body had been cropped. Contrary to Hall et al. (2011) who found that use of self-sexualization was decreased with age on *MySpace*, this study found self-sexualization in the form of objectification is present in all age categories on *Backpage*. Moreover, cropping techniques were the most common form of self-sexualization/self-objectification. These dissimilarities may be attributed to different purposes of personals and differences between media business models. *Backpage* posters promotes service, whereas *MySpace* posters promote themselves. These differences could also be explained both from the legal and business standpoints. While showing *MySpace* profiles to others is not criminalized by any laws or prohibited by any clearance policies of the media, posting an illegal personal of sex-related nature on *Backpage* could lead to criminal punishment of a poster.

Results obtained by this study reaffirm the previous findings of Castle and Lee (2008), who studied sex-related personals on specialized websites and mentions of prices. This study found that providers exposed full faces only in 42% of personals. In comparison, after examining the content of 76 websites dedicated solely to the promotion of escort services, Castle and Lee (2008) reported that in an effort to conceal their identity, providers self-censored online personals (p. 118). These differences might also be due to different purposes of online platforms. In comparison to the *Backpage* escort ads section, websites dedicated exclusively to the promotion of escort services are

encouraged to list all information by providing them with a template (e.g., list number of received reviews and elaborate on each). Hence, online classifieds such as *Backpage* has less opportunities for providers to establish their image as professionals.

Professionalism

Fourteen criteria were coded to assess the levels of professional culture in the ads: (1) Escort Service Availability to particular racial groups, (2) Client Conduct and (3) Client Reassurance, (4) Escort Provider's Agency (5) Escort Service Discretion, (6) Variety of Services, (7) Service Professionalism (skills, reviews, status), (8) Escort Service Provider's Posture, (9) Escort Service Provider's Description (body measurements), (10) Promise of Satisfaction, (11) Escort Service Provider's Character (business style, behavioral characteristics), (12) Escort Service Provider's Dress (except nudity), (13) Escort Service Provider's Face Expression, and (14) Escort Service Provider's Face Visibility.

The inclusion of statements limiting provision of services to clients of a particular race, exemplified by the variable of escort services availability, might be interpreted as providers understanding risks of dealing with criminal world. Significant results for Atlanta and results for Chicago that are at the margin of significance ($p < .056$) support this statement and demand further research. This study found that 75 ads for Atlanta and 107 ads for Chicago specified that they provide no service to gang members.

There are more than 600 gangs in Chicago, with a "minimum membership of 70,000." Chicago has been identified as the "gang capital of the United States" (CBS News, 2013); Atlanta also has a reputation of being a top city associated with gang homicides. The majority of gang members are under 35 years of age and Black. The

crimes committed by gangs include different types of assaults, including rape (Paluska, 2013). There are more than 100 gangs in the state of Georgia, the majority of which is drug-driven and located in Atlanta (Stuart, 2010). Such caution exercised in providing the service is also indicative of emerging "professionalism" of workers in the sex industry.

Many of those who indicate their unwillingness to provide services to members of particular racial groups indicate that they do not want to discriminate on the basis of race; they deny service because they want clients to behave, abide by some rules, which gang members will not honor. The importance of honoring the rules in regard to escort services signifies the importance of such categories as client conduct, client reassurance, agency of the provider, and service discretion. Significantly more Caucasian than Black or Hispanic providers were very explicit in their reluctance to provide service to African Americans less than 35 years of age; this unwillingness exemplifies the implied fear of providers afraid of being sexually assaulted and murdered. Indicating their unwillingness to service gang members, providers make an attempt at demonstrating their authority and right to be treated with respect, the rights inherent in any code of any profession.

Mentions about variety of specific services provided might also serve as an indication of professionalism. GFE and kissing could be regarded as one of such indicators. Very few instances of GFE offers included kissing (.5%). Unlike earlier findings (Castle & Lee, 2008; Pruitt & Krull, 2011), ads mentioning offerings of GFE were rare in ads analyzed here. This could be due to the differences between business platforms of online classifieds as opposed to specialized escort websites. In comparison to Pruitt and Krull (2011) who, studying websites for escort services, found that "unrushed" experiences were offered in less than 13% of ads, the present study found that

it was offered in 24% of ads. In comparison to Pruitt and Krull (2011), who found offers of "discreet" experiences in 13% of ads and offers of "girl-next-door" experiences in 21% ads, the present study found that promises of discretion were offered in 16% of the personals, whereas "girl-next-door" attributes of providers were emphasized in 13% of the advertisements. These differences could be explained by several factors.

The criminalization of the sex industry requires all posters of escort ads to be cautious. The niche status or specificity of the media platform for advertising of escort services determines the willingness of the posters to reveal information about services offered and about themselves. In comparison to specialized websites, the escorts section of *Backpage* lacks attributes of a professional culture that could contribute to defining the rules of "business conduct." These rules contribute to establishment of a so-called "pseudo-legal" environment in regard to criminalized activities such as sex work. Specialized websites for escort services as *Naughty Reviews*, *CityVibe*, and *ErosGuide* offer features that establish this environment, including search and filter options that allow clients to choose desirable parameters of an escort provider (*ErosGuide*), indicators for online presence of providers, such as availability to chat (*CityVibe*), and extended reviews for providers of escort services (*Naughty Reviews*).

Providers' bodies demonstrate posters' compliance with media policies as well as how they express their professional style. Partially confirming findings of Hall et al. (2011), this study found that Hispanic and Black service providers used self-sexualization and self-objectification techniques more than providers of other races. However, unlike the findings of Hall et al. (2011), this study found that cropping techniques were not

popular tools of self-sexualization for Hispanic providers, perhaps indicating a tendency of Hispanics to celebrate their bodies (Martinez, 2008).

The "standard information" template in online personals is one more criterion, which contributes to "business conduct" of providers. Consistent with the previous research (Castle & Lee, 2008), this study outlined the "standard information" (p. 118) contained in personals, which included photos, contact information, and a tagline. Conversely to findings of Pruitt and Krull (2011), the present study found that body measurements of escort providers (e.g., chest-waist-hips parameters) were reported very rarely as a part of "standard information." Surprisingly, posters on *Backpage* refrained from providing the basic information, relying on subtlety instead.

Vagueness of language contributes to escort service providers' arsenal of pseudo-legal tools. Like street walkers, online providers use a promise of satisfaction to attract clients, which contributes to online pseudo-legal status of the service. Providers who publish personals on escort websites, do not pay attention to the satisfaction of desires as much as the providers posting personals on the escorts services section of *Backpage*. The findings of Pruitt and Krull (2011) who claimed that escort providers "structure their ads in ways that appeal to men's reasons for patronage" – went against findings of the present study, where 38.4% of providers offered the promise of satisfaction.

The differences between providers advertised in the escort section of *Backpage* and special escort websites do not end here. Striving to secure legitimacy and attract as many clients as possible, providers of escort services on *Backpage* might want to offer their services because of their acute need of money, which makes them hobbyists,^{xiii} rather than "professional" escorts or who earn money by solely providing escort services.

One more criterion of professionalism is represented by a variable of provider's character. This study reported that providers were more likely to report about personality than appearance (70% and 42% of ads did not report anything about appearance and personality respectively). By contrast, Pruitt and Krull's study (2011) found that "women are more likely to report characteristics associated with their appearance than their personality" (p. 55).

Applying the Model for Advertising Appeals to Personals

Discussion offered here bridges the findings of the present study to previous research on advertising appeals, providing a basis for further analysis of controversial services advertising.

The fourth research question posed was:

RQ4: Where in the informational/transformational theoretical framework do online personals fall?

Criminalization of sex work imposes properties of tensility upon the content of online personals; that is why determining the position of escort services within Rossiter-Percy Planning Grid is difficult. Two more challenges obstruct that grid in its original form to be used in the assessment of online personals. First, despite the prevailing opinion that informational or rational appeals are more prominent in utilitarian service advertisements, and transformational or emotional appeals are more prominent in advertising for experiential services, studies of services advertising provide mixed evidence as to the most effective type of advertising appeal. Consistent with Albers-Miller and Stafford (1999), this study found that experiential services use both informational and transformational advertising appeals. Still, posters of personals rely on

transformational techniques for the purposes of self-objectification. At the same time, they use informational techniques to make sure the clients understand the rules of conduct.

Second, depending on the clues listed in online personals, any legal offer of massage could be easily interpreted as the one transgressing the law, intensifying the criminal and social risks involved (using the language of Rossiter-Percy Planning Grid). Hence, the presence of criminal and social risks associated with buying an escort service allows for informational advertising appeals to be as effective for escort or experiential services as they are for utilitarian ones. At the same time, emotions associated with buying an escort service point to the relative effectiveness of experiential and transformational advertising.

As a result, if used for content analysis, Rossiter-Percy Planning Grid fails to enrich our understanding about the structure of online personals. Further breakdown of categories comprising the Rossiter-Percy Planning Grid for content of personals for controversial services is needed. To do that, one must juxtapose transformational and informational ad appeals with something else. This section suggests using previously discussed indicators for content analysis. The purpose of this is to prepare the framework for coding of the controversial content, while accounting for the sex-related industry initiatives, laws, and clearance policies. Drawing upon research on services and the uses of informational and transformational advertising appeals, the framework outlined here will provide a template, structuring research on controversial services to eliminate bias, questionable judgments, and exaggerations.

For the most part, the findings offered by this study confirm findings from previous research on the content of online personals: informational and transformational advertising appeals are distributed relatively equally in the personals for escort services (see Tables 4.10, 4.11, and 4.12), with some exceptions concerning portrayals of minors. Online personals exhibiting features of legality and clearance compliance as well as legality and professionalism relied more on informational than transformational cues, with the exception of personals posted on behalf of the providers that contained disclaimers and prices, while featuring sexually clothed minors. At the same time, online personals exhibiting features of clearance compliance and professionalism relied more on transformational than informational cues, except for self-censored personals or personals that employed cropping techniques featuring providers in specific postures. This finding might be explained by the ability of posters to employ ambiguity in the content of online personals. Also, this finding might be due to the relative vagueness of what is legal: the U.S. penal codes do not explicitly outline what not to do in order not to be penalized for sex solicitation. These findings emphasize importance of such coding variables as: dress, personal ad self-censorship, posture of providers, perceived age and agency of providers, as well as mentions of anti-prostitution disclaimer and price within the ad. Placed at the intersection of legality, clearance, and professionalism, these variables provide more information about the content of personals than any other variables in the study.

The discussion surrounding three indicators mentioned here and how they structure the content summates the points raised earlier and organizes indicators of legality, clearance compliance, and professionalism into the framework of sexual and transformational advertising appeals that allows for unbiased content coding.

The fifth research question addressed the role of sexual appeals in controversial services advertising. Specifically, examining how the framework for informational/transformational advertising could be used alongside sexual advertising appeal to contribute to understanding content of the personals, while having legality and clearance policies as a context:

RQ5: What is the role of sexual appeal in escort services advertising? Accounting for the role of sexual appeal in advertising of escort services, how is the framework for informational and transformational advertising used to elaborate on legality of and clearance policies applied to online personals?

Research on sexual advertising appeals has outlined the changing social role of dress in advertising in general (Soley & Reid, 1988; Reichert & Lambiase, 1999), use of sexual appeal in advertising controversial products (Reichert et al., 2012), and the meaning of dress for consumers' sexual desires (Reichert & Lambiase, 2003). In contrast to findings from studies conducted on magazine ads in 1964 and 1984, the present study reported that there were significantly more partially than suggestively clad providers in online personals. The present study also revealed that a majority of the photos featured only one provider, which differs from the findings of earlier studies on sexual appeal in magazine advertising. These differences might be a result of the nature of advertising, because earlier studies analyzed magazine ads and the present study analyzed online personals.

The positioning of escort services advertising is unique. An alternative explanation could be related to the nature of the service advertised. Given that self-sexualization represents one of the main strategies used by escort service providers to

make a "professional statement," it is not surprising that escort providers expose their bodies. Interestingly, this study found that the ads using the appeal of sexual behavior are matched by the ads using the appeals of sexual self-esteem and attractiveness. In contrast, previous studies claim that sexual appeals of esteem and attractiveness are used less often than ad appeal of sexual behavior. Reichert and Lambiase (2003, p. 131) found that about 85% of ads targeting men use the ad appeal of sexual behavior.

This study found that for the most part ads for escort services rely on informational and transformational content. This study operationalized visual sexual imagery by four variables of Escort Service Provider's Sexual Exposure, Escort Service Providers' Sexual Look, Escort Service Provider's Sexual Action, and Escort Service Provider's Dress. Almost 94% or 4,658 ads out of 4,956 featured suggestively clad (28%), partially clad (58%), and nude providers (8%). Excluding the category of dress from the visual sexual imagery slightly alters the picture, including photos of breasts, genitalia, and buttocks outnumber all other ads (2,880 out of 4,956, or 58.11%). Approximately 70% of ads featured providers in sexually suggestive postures and sixty percent of ads (60%) featured providers performing some sort of sexual action. In comparison, ads for travel and entertainment contain 23% and 21% of sexual imagery, whereas advertising of other product categories contains only 14% of informational visual sex stimuli for high-involvement products as opposed to 24% of ads for low-involvement products (Reichert, 2012, pp. 13-15).

As discussed earlier, this study not only sought to place escort services within the framework of informational and transformational advertising, but also to examine them, while taking clearance policies and laws into consideration. To do that, it constructs a

comparative grid that includes elements of informational, transformational, and sexual advertising appeals, intertwined with the indicators of professionalism, legality, and clearance compliance.

Relying extensively on the classification of sexual appeals in advertising developed by Hennink-Kaminski and Reichert (2011) to distinguish between sexual appeals of attractiveness, self-esteem, and behavior, this study views sexual appeal, an integral part of transformational advertising, as a toolbox capable of exploring how online personals abide by laws and by clearance policies. Similarly to Lee et al. (2011), content analyzing visuals and text, this study explores different transformational appeals in their connection with sexual appeal. Juxtaposition of sexual and transformational appeals in advertising is useful, because sexual appeal and transformational ad appeal are widely employed in personals for escort services.

Theoretical implications that situate this study within the multi-faceted framework are shown in the grid that outlines the structure of transformational advertising content for controversial services (see Table 5.1). The proposed grid is a tool that would allow seeing how advertising of controversial services is structured, approaching understanding of vulnerable populations and controversial services. For example, the grid connects the ego involvement appeal (as a part of transformational appeal) and sexual appeal or the appeal of sex behavior in those personals that include the promise of satisfaction. The grid connects the conspicuousness of consumption appeal (as a part of transformational appeal) and sexual appeal or sexual self-esteem in those personals that emphasize the elite status of the service. The grid opens new dimensions for thinking about effectiveness of advertising, accounting for their legality and clearance compliance.

Table 5.1.

Transformational and Sexual Ad Content for Controversial Services

Transformational Advertising Appeal	Categories of Content Analysis	Sexual Appeal in Advertising
Service Innovation	<i>Variety of Services (e.g., BDSM)</i>	Sexual Behavior
Ego Involvement	<i>Promise of Satisfaction</i>	Sexual Behavior
Service Homogeneity	<i>Escort Service Provider's Character (e.g., Sexy, Sweet, Freaky)</i> <i>Escort Service Provider's Sexual Exposure</i> <i>Escort Service Provider's Sexual Look</i> <i>Escort Service Provider's Sexual Action</i> <i>Escort Services Availability</i> <i>Client Conduct</i> <i>Service Discretion</i> <i>Escort Service Provider's Agency</i> <i>Client Reassurance</i>	Sexual Behavior
	<i>Visibility of Escort Service Provider's Body</i> <i>Personal Ad Self-Censorship</i> <i>Escort Service Provider's Description</i> <i>Escort Service Provider's Posture</i> <i>Escort Service Provider's Licensed Withdrawal</i> <i>Escort Service Provider's Face Visibility</i>	Sexual Attractiveness
Service Homogeneity/ Conspicuousness of Consumption	<i>Provider's Dress</i> <i>Escort Service Provider's Perceived Age</i> <i>Escort Service Provider's Race</i> <i>Escort Service Provider's Nationality</i> <i>Service Professionalism (Skills, Reviews)</i>	Sexual Attractiveness/ Sex-Esteem
Conspicuousness of Consumption	<i>Service Professionalism (Status)</i> <i>Service Solicitation (Billing)</i>	Sex-Esteem

Limitations

As with all studies, this study has limitations. Areas of concern are those typically associated with the use of content analysis as a method: its descriptive nature, lack of generalizability, and internal validity of the coding categories.

Content analysis as a method sometimes challenged for its inability to identify the "underlying motives for the observed patterns" (Kolbe & Burnett, 1991). This study sought to cover the content of advertising for escort services, and even though the descriptive nature of content analysis suits this task well, studies that use other methods could add to the exploration of interrelationships between personals for escort services, public attitudes, and policies. The second issue concerns the use of scales from multiple studies to code the data for the present study. Scales which were successfully replicated in content analytic studies greatly contributed to the description of the content of online personals, but diminished internal validity of the scale made of 33 categories that comprise this study, if such scale were ever to be created. Acknowledging the necessity of conducting valid analysis, this study's goal was to cover all attributes of personals comprehensively. While achieving that goal, this study did not construct a valid scale to cover the content of personals, the issue that should be addressed in the future.

The third issue revolves around the sample of cities chosen for this study. This study has achieved a goal of exploring the online content of escort personals in major cities that have reputation for being hubs of entertainment and illicit illegal activities. It sought to build a composite template for the major U.S. cities, it did not, however, provide a template for escort ads for all cities.

Implications

The primary implications drawn from this study are in the realm of public policy, law, and industry self-organization. The results indicate a strong need to address the issues faced by major types of posters: posters of personals for genuine massage and escort services, posters of personals for sex work disguised as masseuses and escort providers, posters of personals for prostitution, and, finally, posters of advertisements featuring human trafficking victims.

The first implication of this study would be to address the ambiguous status of genuine masseuses and escort providers by encouraging professionalization of these workers and their respective industries. Judging from 317 ads (6.4%) containing offers of massage, their self-organization and implementation of some professional statutes for sex-related professions could benefit providers of these sex-related services. It is not only the need to draw the line between what is considered to be legal and what is not (which is done by penal codes and law in regard to regulating these realms and by clearance policies of media in regard to monitoring ads for them), but also a need for workers to work toward their professionalization so that their personals would not be misconstrued as ads for prostitution if they offer none. These initiatives would ensure that genuine masseuses and escort service providers having security of being recognized as a profession, not only on paper of licenses and certificates, but also by the public opinion.

Second, there is a need to address the ambiguous status of sex workers, which could be done by clarifying the definitions related to sex work in penal codes. Judging from 302 personals that contained anti-prostitution disclaimers found by the present study, these personals might mean that their posters are sex workers disguised as escort

providers or massage therapists. Hence, more detailed elaboration on penal laws is required for providers of these personals to stop avoiding punishment.

Third, there is a need to distinguish between prostitution and human trafficking, which should be done by outlining the key definitions and concerns on all levels of policy and law-making. According to the assessment conducted by this study, many minors are trafficked and advertised online. Apart from being sold in sex slavery and forced to perform sexual acts, some of the victims of human trafficking might consent to working as prostitutes or work as genuine escorts for meager wages to feed their families. But the crucial difference is in the financial compensation received by these women, their agency over their life, their psychological well-being, and age.

On the level of media clearance policies for advertising, *Backpage* has already instituted negotiated self-regulatory policies and is cooperating with human trafficking helplines, posting their numbers on the escorts services section so that the people could seek help. But there are additional things that could have been useful. Additional fighting human trafficking often means finding trafficked minors. Methods should be developed to check the perceived age of the person within the photos. These proposals would make it more difficult for the human traffickers to sell women in slavery, at the very same time, these actions would not compromise providers who work in the sex-related industry legally. Apart from definitions, educational programs aimed at elaborating the differences between the prostitution and human trafficking should also be implemented on federal, state, and community levels.

Future Directions and Extensions of Research

This study is a first step in a long-term project aimed at drawing clearer lines between illegal vs. legal advertising for controversial services. Future research will address the questions about the impact of different business platforms for advertising of escort services (specialized as opposed to non-specialized) onto clients' and provider's perceptions about the service: what are differences in the demographics? What are the reasons for pursuing a career in escort service? Answers to these questions would contribute to understanding the publics involved when it comes to the demand for escort services; they will also lead to the research about gratifications and uses received by the clients who saw these personals.

The research on gratifications from the escort service paves the way to understanding the motives of clients: what are the uses and gratifications sought by clients? How do clients' expectations differ from those of providers, if at all? This research will also be beneficial in regard to determining any connections between what is legal and what is not in regard to the gratifications sought and uses of escort services by the clients and providers.

Bridging research on escort services with the research on services advertising, future research should explore the phenomenon of *tensility* as an attribute of personals for sex-related personals. Studying tensility, new dimensions of thinking about professionalism will be opened by exploring such questions as: What is the role of vagueness in providers' branding themselves as professionals? What dimensions of their service do they believe to be important for professionalization? Do they feel that professionalization of their industry is necessary? What challenges and opportunities

exist? What are the attitudes of clients regarding professionalization of the sex-related services and the sex industry? Hence, one of the avenues for future research offered by this study is to address the issues of professionalism and what it means to be a professional in the sex-related industry. The following questions could provide additional insights: what does it mean to be a professional sex worker? A professional masseuse? Interviews with posters could address this issue. Future research on the issues like these could open the door to understanding the professional culture of sex services and non-sexual services.

Reichert et al. (2012) found the use of sexual advertising appeals tripled in the last three decades in regard to advertising of controversial products. Further behavioral research on sexual appeal in advertising and controversial services should be aimed at testing "professionalism" indicators for controversial services developed in this study. These future studies could contribute to researchers' understanding of professional culture, which is not recognized by the society in the case of sex workers and which is hardly ever spoken of in the case of genuine masseuses or escort providers. This *invisibility* of professional culture makes providers of these services vulnerable to stigma fostered by the public's perceptions about all escort services advertised on *Backpage* as prostitution.

Follow-up studies will use the results of the present study and will include the interviews with clients of escort providers and escort providers as well as general public, so that the motivations of clients of escort services could be explored. Future research should explore the reasons behind excessive promises in some ads that provide only a promise to satisfy desires of clients without offering any other information or any

disclaimer about appropriate clients' conduct. Any relationships between these promises and the well-being of the provider should also be addressed with the help of in-depth interviews or anonymous surveys. These studies will shed light on any illegal activities in the sex industry and ways for media to recognize them and to prevent their marketing online.

One more avenue for future research is to address the concerns regarding the content of online personals posted on *Backpage*, i.e., how to distinguish an ad for prostitution as opposed to an ad for non-sexual escort service. Apart from testing "clearance compliance" and "legality" indicators in general, future studies could develop and test exclusively "prostitution indicators" in online ads. It could be done by comparing the content of escort services on *Backpage* in the countries where sex work is illegal (United States) vs. the countries where it is legal (Netherlands) vs. the countries where sex work has become legal just recently (Canada). Additionally, valuable insights might be obtained from the online personals published in the *Backpage* escorts section before prostitution became legal and after it.

For example, as Canada has struck down the anti-prostitution laws in December 2013 (CBC News, 2013), will the personals from the escorts section of *Backpage* for Canadian cities be different from the cities in the United States? Will they feature providers in similar sexual postures? Will they contain any references to sex solicitation or prostitution? These and many related questions should be addressed to assess the content of the online personals and the attributes of online personals which could serve as predictors of prostitution. Due to strictly defined regulations of sex work in the countries

where sex work is legal, it would be possible for some providers to advertise their services openly, without being afraid.

Combined with those providers who already advertise their sex work services openly, providers, who were disguised as escort providers on *Backpage* when sex work was illegal, might be more willing to advertise their services openly. Future research could identify the basis for such a comparative, more credible, research by conducting studies that would test "prostitution indicators." These indicators could only be explored in an objective manner by looking at the content of personals, while comparing clear definitions of regulations of the countries where sex work is legal as opposed to penal codes of the countries where it is illegal. Such research will make it possible to rely on objectivity and to disregard questionable parameters when judging the content of ads for escort services, parameters which could stand for the ad's "sex work" and "non-sexual" nature at the same time.

To fully understand how the content of online personals is produced, how it works, and how its legality or clearance compliance could be predicted by examining certain attributes, future research aimed at structuring relationships within these ads is needed. Research on internally valid scales suitable for comprehensive analysis of the content of personals will be beneficial to achieve this goal. If created, such a scale will bring clarity to the meaning of professional culture of escort services, and, by doing so, will contribute to the buildup of "professionalism" indicators in the sex-related services and their promotion.

Transformational and informational elements of advertising appeals should be studied with an eye on their uses for online personals and gratifications for clients of

escort services obtained from the personals. Apart from the research on what clients as opposed to providers make out of online personals, future research should address the clients' attitudes to online personals in regard to how effective, in their opinion, different ads that use informational vs. transformational elements are. Confirmatory factor analysis preceded by surveys of posters, clients, and media companies represents the next step in testing how advertising appeals work with clearance and legality mechanisms accounted for. Using three indicators for professionalism, legality, and clearance compliance developed in this study, future studies will provide answers to such questions as: what makes one think that the provider featured in the ad offers services willingly and is not a victim of some scam? What are the key attributes of a personal that depict professionalism of the provider? How can one understand the legality of the escort ads? Are all escort personals legal/illegal? What attributes of the escort personals speak to the legality as opposed to clearance compliance on *Backpage* the most? What would be the most effective (but legal and clearance compliant) match between provider's dress and use of sexual appeal in terms of advertising effectiveness (e.g., suggestive, partially clad)?

One of the challenges for future research is to develop and test "human trafficking indicators." The most difficult avenue for research will be to study attitudes of the escort providers to prostitutes or escort providers disguised as prostitutes. By doing that, future research will explore the issues surrounding the agency of the escort providers and its role in determining if the advertisement is for prostitution or human trafficking, i.e., if the person within the ad has agency over her body and her actions or she is deprived of it. Because human trafficking is such a complex problem, in order to address the concerns

regarding the content of online personals, future research should test and add more categories to "legality" indicators developed this study. Given the global scope of the problem of human trafficking, the comparative studies done on international scale would ensure that the issue of human trafficking will be covered.

Summary

Addressing the paradox of marketing illegal services using legal means, this study provides a practical starting point for research about the nature and consequences of specific information (Kolbe & Burnett, 1991), online personals for escort services. Examining the content of online personals through the lens of legality and clearance compliance, this study provides a framework, which allows for an unbiased analysis of the content of personals for controversial services, while taking into consideration insights provided by advertising appeals. The framework developed in this study is a first step toward thinking about social justice when it comes to distinguishing between prostitution and human trafficking, promotion of an illegal and legal sex-related services.

The findings of this study suggest that adherence to media clearance policies was as important for the posters of online personals as adherence to the U.S. penal codes, with the exception of posters publishing photos of minors. According to the assessment conducted by this study, approximately half of the personals featured providers who appeared to be minors. This finding could be explained by three factors: the nature of the online medium for the promotion of escort services, the tensility of online personals as their key characteristic, and the use of self-censorship and cropping techniques by posters. First, the fact that the online classifieds represent a relatively new business model adds to the confusion regarding regulations. Second, even though the punishment for the

violation of the U.S. penal code is more severe (e.g., fine, jail) than the punishment for the violation of the clearance policy in online media (e.g., removal of the ad), the posters may have adapted tensility of escort services advertising to their advantage by using vague and coded language. Moreover, posters rely on self-censorship and cropping techniques not only to conceal their private parts (to abide by the clearance policies of the media), but also to conceal their identity (to make it impossible to recognize them on the street if any law enforcement agency were interested in finding them).

Three indicators of legality, clearance compliance, and professionalism of escort providers that comprise the framework introduced by this study represent the tools for enforcing penal codes and clearance policies regarding local prostitution and global human trafficking. This study contributes to developments in legal, clearance compliance, and professional realms regarding sex-related services. The categories associated with "legality" should be used for improvements of the U.S. penal codes. Similarly, categories associated with "clearance compliance" should be used for making clearance policies in media more transparent. The categories associated with "professionalism" should be used for the purposes of self-identification by escort service providers whose habitual use of pseudo-professional attributes in online personals reflect the need to establish professional authority. Thus, the framework also provides a mechanism for legitimate escort service providers and workers of sex-related services to establish their rules of "business conduct," paving the way to professionalism of the legal sex industry.

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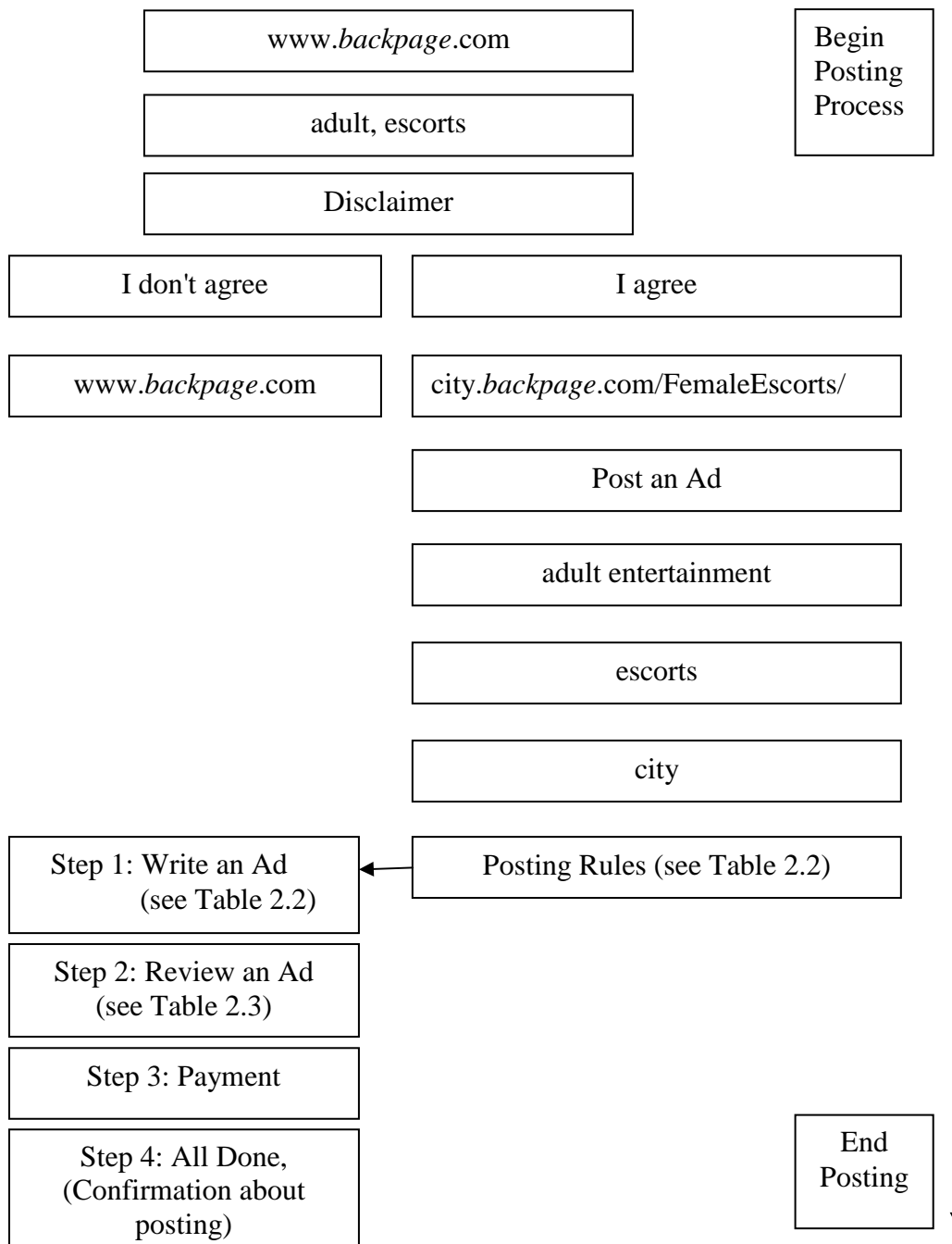
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LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A

Posting a personal in the escort section of *Backpage*



Appendix B

Codebook

Coding categories: TEXT

TEXT is represented by words, numbers, and symbols. Text is the body of an advertisement, including headings and subheadings of the advertisements. Subject of the advertisement should also be treated as text.

FEATURES OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

1. AD_MONTH - Month of the Publication

1=January	7=July
2=February	8=August
3=March	9=September
4=April	10=October
5=May	11=November
6=June	12= December

2. AD_CITY - *Backpage.com* City

1=NYC, 2=Atlanta, 3=Chicago, 4=San Francisco

3. AD_AGE_LISTED - Listed Age of the Escort Service Provider

If no age is listed in the title of the personal, but there is a mention of age within the ad, put age listed within the ad to indicate the age listed within the online personal. If none is indicated, put 99.

4. AD_SHORTHAND - Presence of Shorthand Language:

Is shorthand language present within the ad?

1=Yes, 2=No

Example of shorthand language:

"36JJ's"

5. AD_DIVERSITY - Escort Service Availability to Members of Racial Groups:

Does an ad provide services for clients of a particular race only?

1=Yes, 2=No

6. AD_PRESENCE - Presence of People Other than the Escort Service Provider:

Are there any other people present in the ad?

1=Yes, 2=No

Coders should look for other people (than the poster(s) of the ad) within the ad. If there are two posters of the ad, are there any more people in the background or near them? If there is more than one person within the ad, coders should code every person appearing within the ad separately.

7. AD_FRAME – Personal Ad Frame:

How is the photo framed?

1=Front-view, 2= Rear-view, 3=Side-view, 4=Not Applicable



Front-view



Side-view

8. AD_SELF_CENSOR - Personal Ad Self-Censorship:

Was the photo within a personal self-censored by its poster?

- 1=Half of the face is not visible due to distortion or sunglasses
- 2=Blurred breasts
- 3=Blurred genitals
- 4=The entire face is hidden or blurred
- 5=No self-censorship



Face is blurred

FEATURES OF SERVICE

Coders should distinguish between various conditions the service is offered with, such as:

9. S_LOCATION - Escort Service Location:

What is the location of the service?

1=In-call, 2=Out-call, 3=Both in-call and out-call, 9=Not Applicable

Example:

In-call: "In calls only!!! NO outcalls"

10. S_PROFESSION - Escort Service Provider's Professional Philosophy:

How professional is the service?

1=Legal disclaimer about prostitution and sex solicitation

2=An emphasis on the skills of the escort service provider

3=Satisfaction of previous clients as it is visible in the reviews of the provider

4=Elite status of the escort service emphasized

9=Not Applicable

Example:

"Five star experience"

11. S_SOLICIT - Solicitation of Donations:

Are there any mentions of price for the service (direct /indirect)?

1=Information about methods of contact

2=Information about methods of payment

3=Information about method of contact and method of payment

4=Not Applicable

Example for information about methods of contact:

"NOW TAKING APPOINTMENTS!!! Phone number"

12. S_REASSURE - Reassurance of Clients:

Does the ad provide any reassurance to clients?

1=Yes, psychological encouragement

2=Yes, "No games, no rush, no drama"

9= Not Applicable

Example of psychological encouragement:

"Don't be shy, call now!"

"I am known to put even the most nervous clients at ease with my relaxing style and outgoing personality."

13. S_DESIREs - Promise of Satisfaction:

Is there a promise to fulfill clients' desires?

Coders should look for words indicating willingness of the provider to please the clients. If there are such statements within the ad, they should be coded accordingly:

1=Yes, 2= No

Example:

"I pride myself on being able to cater to the mildest or wildest of desires"

"I also specialize in fantasy fulfillment, fetishes and adult entertainment"

14. S_DIVERSITY - Variety of Services:

Are multiple services offered (e.g., massage, fetishes)?

Coders should look for sexual offers indicated within the ad: Any references to the possibility of changing sexual scenarios, having multiple partners (of different sex, race) at the same time:

1=Possibility of changing sexual scenarios

2=Possibility of being served by multiple service providers

3=Massage service advertised.

9=Not Applicable

Example:

"Fetishes Welcomed;" "two Asian beauties at your service!!!!"

FEATURES OF CLIENT "CODE OF HONOR"

15. C_ANONYM - Escort Service Discretion:

Is discretion of the service guaranteed?

1=Yes (People can choose to be anonymous)

2=No

16. C_CONDUCT - Client Conduct:

Are there special rules for clients regarding calling/texting the provider? Is there a requirement for a client to be mature?

1=Yes, serious clients only

2=No

3=No phone calls or emails

4=1+3

Example:

"No dirty talkin!"

DESCRIPTION OF THE ESCORT SERVICE PROVIDER

Coders should pay attention to any descriptions of providers, including any mentions of bust size, cup size, height, and weight.

17. M_MULTIPLE – Multiple Escort Service Providers:

Does an ad promote services of two or more escort service providers?

1=Yes, 2=No, 3=Not Applicable

18. M_IN_THIRD_PERSON - Escort Service Provider's Agency (Posting Ads on behalf of the Escort Service Providers):

Is an ad promoting the service of a provider written from the third person?

1=Yes, 2=No, 3=Not Applicable

19. M_DESCRIBE – Escort Service Provider's Description:

How is the physique of the escort service provider described?

1=No description

2=Description of bust and/or cup size

3=Information on height and/or weight

4=Information on hair and/or eye color

5=Mentions of 2 or more items from the list above

9=Not Applicable

Examples for descriptions of bust and/or cup size:

"Im Every Breast Lovers Fantasy With My Out This World 36JJ's!!!!"

"38 DDD that are sure to please"

20. M_ETHN_EMPHASIS – Escort Service Provider's Nationality:

Does the ad mention the country of origin for the escort service provider?

What about her nationality? Ethnicity?

1=Yes, 2=No

21. M_CHARACTER – Escort Service Provider's Character:

What features of the escort service provider are emphasized the most?

1=Independence

3=Gorgeous, Sexy

4=Sweet, "girl next door," "fun to be around"

5=Freaky, dirty sexy

Example:

"An experience with me is best described as the girl next door"

Coding categories: VISUALS

VISUALS are represented by the illustrative materials within the ad, such as photographs and drawings. A photograph is an image recorded by a camera and reproduced online. Some digital distortions, such as blurring and cropping of the photo using computer software are possible.

APPEARANCE OF THE ESCORT SERVICE PROVIDER

Coders should make the most reasonable inference in judging age.

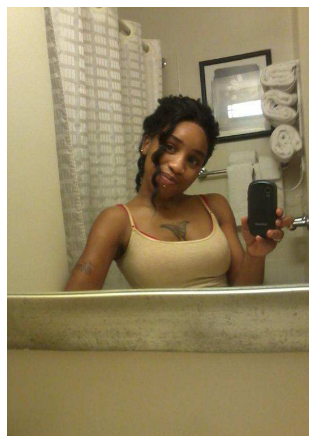
22. M_AGE – Escort Service Provider's Perceived Age:

How old is the escort service provider appears to be?

- 1=Looks as if she were a Child (up to the age 13)
- 2=Looks as if she were an Adolescent/teen (age 13-17)
- 3=Looks as if she were Young adult (age 18-24)
- 4=Looks as if she were an Adult (age 25 and above)
- 9=Cannot be determined



Child



Teen



Young adult



Adult

23. M_RACE - Escort Service Provider's Race:

What race does the escort service provider appear to belong to?

Different facial features should be taken into consideration when assigning a person to one race or another. Coders should try to determine the ethnicity of the provider based on the major impression of the person's look. If it is impossible to determine the race the person belongs to, coders should indicate "Cannot be determined."

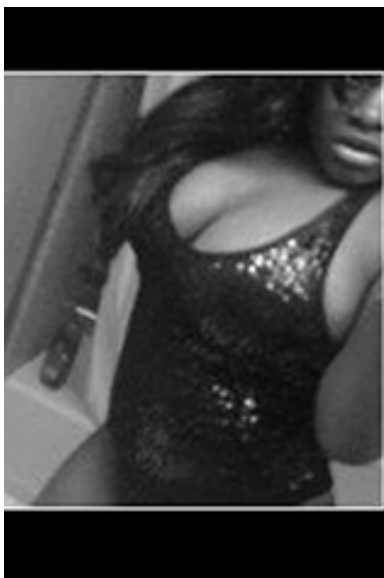
1=Caucasian, 2=Hispanic/Latina, 3=Black, 4=Asian, 5=Mixed, 9=Cannot be determined



Caucasian



Hispanic/Latina



Black



Asian

23. M_DRESS - Escort Service Provider's Dress:

Is the escort service provider portrayed nude? Is she partially clad?

Is she dressed suggestively?

1=Fully dressed

2=Suggestively clad:

- wearing open blouses, shirts or gowns (especially with exposed chest area),
- full-length lingerie (except see-through),
- mini-skirts, muscle shirts, short-skirts,
- tight clothing which enhances the figure,
- hiked skirts that expose the thigh, evening gowns showing excessive thigh

3=Partially clad:

- show under apparel, three-quarter length or shorter lingerie,
- body suits, bikinis,
- models with bare backs, shoulders, and thighs
- poses where model wears only towel

4=Nude:

- bare bodies, including silhouettes,
- wearing translucent under apparel or lingerie,
- see-through lingerie
- no clothes above or below the navel

9=Cannot be determined



Suggestively clad

24. M_EYE_CONTACT - Eye Contact:

Is there an eye contact with the viewer of the online personal?

1=Yes, 2=No, 3=Not Applicable

DEMEANOR OF THE ESCORT SERVICE PROVIDER

25. M_FACE_EXPRESS - Escort Service Provider's Face Expression:

What is the face expression of the escort service provider?

1=Detached, 2=Engaged, agitated, flirty, 3=Neutral, 9=Not Applicable



Engaged, agitated, flirty

26. M_SEX_LOOK - Escort Service Provider's Sexual Look:

Is her look sexually suggestive?

Coders should be able to determine what actions of the provider depicted within the ad make her posture sexually suggestive.

1=Half-closed eyes, 2=(Half)open lips, 3=Legs spread out, 4=Touching parts of the body, 9=Not Applicable



Touching herself



Lips half-open

27. M_POSTURE - Escort Service Provider's Posture:

What is the posture of the escort service provider?

1=Standing, 2=Kneeling, 3=Reclining, 4=Lying, 5=Sitting, 6=Other, 9=Not Applicable

28. M_FACE_VIS - Escort Service Provider's Face Visibility:

Is face of the escort service provider visible?

1=Yes, 2=No, 3=Hidden, only half of it is visible, 9=Not Applicable

29. M_BODY_VIS - Escort Service Provider's Body Visibility:

How is the provider portrayed?

1=Portrayal of the body in full size

2=Portrayal of the head and neck (Head-shot)

3=Portrayal of the head, neck, arms, shoulders until the waistline (Torso-shot)

4=Cropped photo (Half-head; cropped feet at the ankles or knees, cropped arms)



Cropped head

30. M_SEX_EXPOSURE - Escort Service Provider's Sexual Exposure:

Are any of sexual parts of the provider's body exposed?

1=Breasts, 2=Genitalia, 3=Buttocks, 4=Breasts and genitalia, 9=Not Applicable



Exposure of buttocks



Exposure of breasts

31. M_SEX_ACTION - Escort Service Provider's Sexual Action:

Is there any sexual action going on?

1=Massage, 2=Masturbation, 3=Touching genitalia, 4=Kissing, 5=Inviting sexual action,
9=Not Applicable



Inviting sexual action

32. M_WITHDRAW - Escort Service Provider's Licensed Withdrawal:

Are there any signs of withdrawal on the face of the provider?

1=Yes (The model appears to be childlike; she appears to be unaware of her surroundings)

2=No

9=Not Applicable



Averting the gaze



Covering mouth

END NOTES

ⁱGFE or girlfriend experience incorporates "elements of romance and intimacy that go beyond mechanical paid sex" (Kern, 2000, cited in Weitzer, 2005, p. 224)

ⁱⁱNAD is a branch of the advertising industry's voluntary self-regulation program which is administered by the Council of Better Business Bureaus.ⁱⁱ Even though the NARB Panel of experts can uphold, modify or reverse the NAD decision, still, decisions of both NAD and NARB are non-binding.

ⁱⁱⁱPresident and CEO of the ASRC and Executive Vice President, National Advertising, Council of Better Business Bureaus (CBBB).

^{iv}In 1996, U.S. Congress enacted a statutory immunity for user-generated content, (47 U.S.C. 230, Section 230), which notes that websites "aren't liable for third party content except in three specific situations: intellectual property, communications privacy and federal criminal prosecutions." It was done in order to protect the Internet from influences of federal and state laws (Communications Decency Act, 1996).

^{vi}Transsexual escorts

^{vii}BBW stands for "Big Beautiful Woman" (InternetSlang, 2014).

^{viii}Saying that someone is "420 friendly" is "a way to express the acceptance of smoking pot or accepting someone who does so, without overtly mentioning pot or marijuana." The phrase 420-friendly often appears in personal ads, especially on *Craigslist* (Urban Dictionary, 2014).

^{ix}BDSM is described as:

A composite acronym for "B&D" (bondage & discipline); "D&S" (dominance & submission); and "S&M" (somasochism). Used to refer to any consensual activities or lifestyles between adults which include some or all of these things. The term "BDSM" is used in a general sense to describe any situation or practice which includes erotic power exchange, dominance and submission, pain play, bondage, sensation play, or anything related to these (XeromagBlog, 2014).

^xThe population of New York totals 10 million people (in comparison to Atlanta's 443,775, Chicago's 2,7 million, and San Francisco's 825,863).

^{xi}Proportions are based on a total number of ads ($n = 4928$) excluding those ads where the age of the provider could not be determined ($n = 28$).

^{xii}Alcohol's share of ads that use sex appeal went up from 9% in 1983 to 37% in 2012 (Reichert et al., 2012).

^{xiii}Those who provide escort services sporadically, not on a permanent basis. Hence, they do not consider escort service their main occupation.