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### The Hobbyist and the Girlfriend Experience: Behaviors and Preferences of Male Customers of Internet Sexual Service Providers

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# The Hobbyist and the Girlfriend Experience: Behaviors and Preferences of Male Customers of Internet Sexual Service Providers

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This study provides descriptive information about the background characteristics, sexual preferences, attitudes, and motives of men ( $N = 584$ ) who locate and contract with female Internet Sexual Service Providers (ISSP) for paid sex acts through a prostitute review site on the Web. The questionnaire-based findings showed these men preferred the “girlfriend experience” or GFE over all other personal qualities and behaviors. The study contributes to our understanding of a rapidly emerging category of men who seek sexual services on-line and their desire for mutuality and excitement in a provider who is willing to replicate some aspects of a conventional, non-remunerative romantic relationship.

While heterosexual prostitution has received a great deal of attention from social scientists and the general public over the last three decades (Conroy 2006; Faugier and Sargeant 1997; Kennedy et al. 2004; Harcourt and Donovan 2005; Monto and Hotaling 2001; Prieur and Taksdal 1989; Sullivan and Simon 1998), recent years have seen an intensified focus on male purchasers of sexual services (Lowman and Atchison 2006; Monto 2004; Willoughby 2008; Wortley et al. 2002). In North America, much of the information we have about the behaviors, demographics and motives of customers has come from studies of men arrested for soliciting street prostitutes (Monto 1998, 1999, 2001, 2010; Monto and Julka 2009; Monto and McRee 2005), with less attention paid to men who purchase sexual services primarily on the Internet. This particular category of customers enjoys an on-line environment in which the stigma of paying for sex is minimized by both providers and other clients, who define prostitution as a positive form of sexual expression. However, paying for sex is largely criminalized, and the stigmatized identity of “john” is linked with a host of negative associations. Hence, these customers have a strong incentive to conceal their activities, because the risk of arrest or being exposed by others could result in a “spoiled identity” (Goffman 1963).

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The present study provides information on the sexual behavior, motives, and characteristics of a highly elusive population of regular clients of prostitutes who consider themselves “hobbyists.” These men are part of an on-line community based around prostitute review websites in which clients post reviews of their experiences and also communicate on-line with Internet Sexual Service Providers (ISSP) i.e. prostitutes who advertise their sexual services on-line. Hobbyists share information within a forum of insiders and often come to know one another by user names or aliases. In contrast to customers seeking prostitutes on the street, the risk of arrest is extremely low. Although the sample of 584 men who participated in the present study may not be representative of the majority of prostitution customers, it provides insight into a growing subculture of men who solicit indoor prostitutes almost solely by using the Internet. Our study yields a constellation of findings indicating that many of these customers of ISSP seek a “girlfriend experience,” popularly abbreviated GFE, in which their interactions with providers mirror those often found in conventional non-remunerative sexual relationships.

### WHY MEN BUY SEXUAL SERVICES

Winick and Kinsie (1971) suggested that patterns of societal change could influence men’s motivations to pay for sex; however, these motivations appear to have remained relatively consistent despite significant social and political changes in Western societies. This has led several researchers to create thematic frameworks to explain reasons for men’s use of prostitutes. Månsson reviewed the themes revealed by men in a set of Scandinavian studies (Høigård and Finstad [1986] 1992; Hydén 1990; Månsson 2005, 2006, 2008; Månsson and Linders 1984; Prieur and Taksdal 1989), and Monto (1998, 1999, 2010) surveyed 1,342 men arrested for soliciting street prostitutes in the United States. These studies and others suggest a surprisingly consistent set of motives among customers, including (1) *the dirty whore fantasy*; (2) *wanting a different kind of sex than they can receive from non-prostitutes*; (3) *seeing sex as a commodity or product for exchange*; (4) *seeking companionship or comfort*; and (5) *wanting a feminine or subservient woman*.

The prostitute as *the dirty whore* suggests that the forbidden curiosity and excitement about approaching the prostitute can be accompanied by contempt and judgment, all of which may add to the arousal experienced by the customer. The prostitute’s special status as someone with whom controversial or forbidden acts take place makes her useful for the expression of the customer’s sexual repertoire. Clients become isolated from her character as a complete individual, since she is experienced as someone whose primary function is to act out sexually, independent of her personality or character. She also becomes exciting because the setting and context in which prostitution takes place are tied to something risky and illicit, and many customers experience the anticipatory anxiety connected to doing something illegal as a stimulant that in turn helps intensify the entire activity (Monto 1998, 1999, 2010; Prieur and Taksdal 1989). Both Månsson and O’Connell Davidson (1998) concurred that labeling the prostitute with epithets like “whore” liberates the customer from any guilt or self-contempt that he may have for engaging with her in the first place; he can see himself as socially and morally pure, while the prostitute is not. Monto and Hotaling (2001) suggested that some men who are motivated by this particular belief, particularly those who are morally judgmental about sexuality and regularly purchase sex, may be at a greater risk of perpetrating violence against prostitutes. Månsson has remarked on the paradox inherent in several of the themes, particularly in *wanting a different*

*kind of sex than they can receive from non-prostitutes*. Here, the customer is permitted to demand any sexual act available, but also permitted to remain the passive recipient of sexual acts committed upon him by a sexually aggressive woman. This suggests that the more extreme or unusual the sexual act, the more reluctant the client may be to request it from someone other than a prostitute, because the regular partner could consider some of these acts repugnant or unpleasant. There is a compartmentalization between non-paid partners and prostitutes, where encounters with the latter are focused entirely on sexual release rather than love and intimacy (Campbell 1998; Monto 1998, 1999, 2010; Prieur and Taksdal 1989). This dovetails with *seeing sex as a commodity or product for exchange* in which the fee stands as a buffer against any kind of deeper emotional interaction. The customer avoids experiencing a threatening immersion in authentic seduction and a female partner who eventually may demand reciprocity. Customers emphasize that prostitute encounters involve pure sexual pleasure, whereas partners are met with love, intimacy, and some commitment. The lack of commitment beyond the fee paid commodifies the consumer experience. The pecuniary aspect guarantees freedom from being obligated to consider the feelings or sexual desires of the prostitute (Campbell 1998; Månsson 2005, 2006, 2008; Prieur and Taksdal 1989). Paradoxically, while many customers endorse a commodified experience, some do not enjoy the one-sidedness of the relationship, which may further propel the search for new experiences with prostitutes. Therefore, in *seeking companionship or comfort*, men who feel socially inferior or shy may use prostitutes to establish an intimate relationship with a woman who would otherwise be unavailable to them. The customer imagines that no romantic relationship would be possible, except with a prostitute. Månsson has argued that this may be a reflection of men's subjective views of what is available and preferable in the sexual marketplace, while O'Connell Davidson (1998) has criticized the discourse of the prostitute as a kind-hearted comforter or healer, since this permits the customer to believe that his loneliness is the chief reason for seeking out prostitutes. The final theme of *wanting a feminine or subservient woman* may lead the customer to the belief that he is the masculine protector of women who are hyper-feminine, vulnerable and in need of support, when in fact these women have been selected for purposes of domination and control. Månsson has concluded that what men search for in prostitution is more closely related to the socially constructed circumstances of male sexuality than around the physical need for sexual expression.

The notion of power and control over the prostitute can also be seen as part of a commodified perspective on sexuality and a separate motive for seeking paid sex. When the prostitute becomes available, the power to accept or refuse her is granted solely to the customer. While the feeling of power over the prostitute can contribute to the sexual excitement, her mere availability can help attenuate feelings of powerlessness that may be experienced in conventional relationships. Feelings of being either powerful or powerless rest upon the same relationship to the woman's sexuality. Both are built upon the premise that particular women possess something that may induce a man to either beg or pay for it (Monto 1998, 1999, 2010; Prieur and Taksdal 1989). McKeganey and Barnard (1996) noted that customers were attracted to a woman who could be asked to perform any kind of sexual act; the woman was there to provide the sex without any comments or input. Customers also spoke about value for money and they remarked on the limited recourse to complaints once the act was concluded. The authors suggested that dynamics of power and control render the prostitute–customer relationship rather volatile, particularly when both parties hold divergent views of the sexual interaction.

Recent qualitative studies using data from customers who engage with indoor prostitutes have yielded motivational themes that appear to deviate from many of those described above. Rather

than seeking power and control and having contempt toward the prostitute, these men seem to emphasize developing a deeper and more emotionally rewarding relationship with the provider. Here, the sexual relationship is dependent on the quality of the emotional tenor between both parties (Earle and Sharp 2007, 2008; Sanders 2008a, 2008b). The client expects and desires emotional labor from the prostitute (Hochschild 1983; Lucas 2005). In addition, courtship rituals and romance, love and physical non-sexual affection are sought together with sexual acts that differ very little or not at all from those in conventional non-paid relationships. Clients often report spending more time giving pleasure to the women than focusing on their own sexual needs, and their efforts to facilitate orgasms for the prostitute may offer a measure of self-validation. This study further explores the expectations and desires of men who seek out Internet Sexual Service Providers through a prostitute review website, specifically the Erotic Review.com.

### SOLICITING PROSTITUTES THROUGH THE INTERNET

The Internet has become a daily feature of American lives, with over 77% of the North American population having logged in at least once in 2010 (Internet World Stats 2011). Among adults, a significant portion of the time spent in front of computers or on wireless mobile devices is related to downloading sexual images, viewing pornographic videos, and sometimes locating sex partners (Castle and Lee 2008; Earle and Sharp 2007, 2008; Holt and Blevins 2007; Hughes 2004; Kern 2001; Månsson 2008; Sanders, 2008a, 2008b, 2009; Sharp and Earle 2002, Soothill and Sanders 2005). A great deal of information on prostitution and related activities can now be accessed globally via computer on the World Wide Web.

During the last decade, the Internet has become a place where customers can also share consumer information about providers of sexual services, and there is a growing body of research on the content of these messages. Kern's (2001) study of 1,901 messages posted by 958 authors on the now defunct on-line bulletin board *alt.sex.prostitution* found members discussing many topics, including various forms of outdoor and indoor prostitution, and law enforcement activities in specific geographical areas. Approximately 11% of the messages were reviews, which often contained short descriptions of prostitutes and numerical ratings of their appearance and attitudes, as well as contact information. One of the dominant themes in the group was that paying more for sexual services with higher-class escorts was safer and more pleasant. Additionally, "the consistent importance of the surrogate social bonds provided by the encounter" (p. 123) was a motive for seeking prostitutes among many of the members. Consistent with this theme, prostitutes who appear to enjoy the sexual act are given more positive reviews; in fact, those who receive the highest ratings reportedly provide "the girlfriend experience," or GFE (Holt and Blevins 2007, p. 347). Both customers and providers have increasingly used the term GFE to refer to encounters that replicate aspects of non-remunerative relationships and also contain conventional sex acts (Earle and Sharp 2007, 2008; Sanders 2008a, 2008b, 2009). Bernstein (2001, 2007a, 2007b) argues that information technology, an increase worldwide in temporary employment, and global migration have fueled the diversification of sexual labor in which providers specialize and target their services to specific types of customers. The relational services offered by providers offer a "bounded authenticity" within an "emotionally bounded erotic exchange" (2007a, p. 197). Like other commercially packaged leisure activities, affection and emotion are

available for sale and for purchase. Further, Bernstein has claimed that one example of bounded authenticity with its limitations is the increasingly popular GFE (2007a, p. 194).

There is some evidence that on-line discussion boards and review websites provide a degree of normative regulation among clients, which would serve to maintain the mirroring of aspects of a conventional heterosexual courtship. Sanders (2008b) has proposed that there exists “a collective pressure” (p. 61) on the Web that standardizes client conduct and puts morality in focus among men who buy commercial sex. Reviews are often filtered through the criteria of the website moderators as well as the moral code of reviewers and providers alike. Prospective customers considering the purchase of sex are exposed to a set of fairly stringent standards concerning appropriate conduct. The regulation of on-line behavior appears to influence reviews of the sexual experiences, which may result in greater trust between customers and prostitutes during consensual sessions. Review sites reinforce the necessity of safe sex and condom use. Client misconduct revealed in reviews or in chat rooms is subject to immediate opprobrium and “flames” (i.e. forceful disapproval posted in response to the offender). The official policy of some review sites rejects child prostitution, derogatory discussions of providers, and paraphilic sexual activities. Finally, clients are loath to purchasing outdoor sex because they perceive this market as violent and dangerous, associating the exploitation of outdoor prostitutes with pimping or trafficking (Sanders 2008a, 2008b, 2009; Soothill and Sanders 2005).

### THE EROTIC REVIEW WEBSITE

The practice of posting on-line reviews of prostitutes dates back to the late 1990s (Hamilton 2008), when the first reviews of prostitutes’ physical attributes and sexual performance started appearing on message bulletin boards such as *alt.sex.prostitution* (Kern 2001). The reviews were in the form of message postings and there were no review databases tied to the sites. The originators of these initial message boards were peer-to-peer groups of computer-literate male customers of female prostitutes. One such group solicited computer programmer David Elms to write code that would support a database search program. In 1999, the first fully searchable database was incorporated into a dedicated prostitute review website named The Erotic Review.com and posted on the Web. In tandem with this development, ISSP began promoting their services on proprietary Web pages, thereby supporting the emergence of additional review websites (D. Elms, personal communication, 1 April 2008).

The review website of interest to this study was The Erotic Review.com, referred to as TER among its users and ranked among the top 1,500 most visited websites in the United States (Alexa.com 11 October 2011). According to information found on the website, TER has over 1,000,000 registered members. The site receives between 250,000–300,000 unique Internet visitors daily and contains more than 800,000 reviews including the names and contact information of 75,000–100,000 ISSP or simply “providers,” another name for prostitutes and sexual massage practitioners who can be located by using the Internet. Less than 10% of those who log into TER write and post actual reviews of the ISSP. Of those reviewers, about 1% also post messages to the more than 50 discussion boards. The boards are listed according to U.S. metropolitan areas (e.g. New York, Los Angeles, Houston), or according to special interest such as Sports Talk, Politics and Religion, and The Erotic Highway, a psychosexual advice/discussion board that at the time of the study was moderated by the first author pro bono under an anonymous

username, in order to gain access to its elusive client population. Registration for members is free and requires only a username and self-generated password. The main website content can be accessed at no charge, with the exception of ISSP review scores, session cost information, and the sexually explicit details of a review. A nominal monthly fee is charged to access these details; in lieu of payment, the site accepts the submission and publication of two new reviews every 30 days for continuing VIP access.

The frequently asked questions (FAQ) on the site state that in addition to ISSP reviews, the website offers “how to meet and greet” guides for first time customers; tips on escort etiquette; advice on how to avoid legal entrapment; information about the fees charged; sexual advice; and erotic stories, among other items. Members called “hobbyists” log in to TER for information, support, and camaraderie. Information on policies and samples of ISSP reviews explains the benefits of joining the site as a member. The search engine, the nucleus of the database program, features such explicit search functions as “lick pussy” and “cum in mouth,” in addition to a 10-point scale for provider appearance and performance criteria. Ratings range from 1, that is, *I was really scared* (appearance) and *A total rip-off* (performance), to 10, that is, *She was one in a million* (appearance) and *It was one in a million* (performance). The review itself is split in General Details, accessible to all members, and Juicy Details, which can be read only by paying members. In contrast to the General Details, which offer the reviewer’s overall description of the provider and the encounter, the Juicy Details describe the sexual encounter from beginning to end in explicit terms, acronyms and slang particular to the review site vernacular such as BBBJ (Bareback Blow Job), DATY (Dining at the Y), or YMMV (Your Mileage May Vary).

The purpose of the national and regional discussion groups is ostensibly to post messages and to initiate discussions about prostitution in general and provider/hobbyist issues in particular. Both providers and hobbyists participate in discussion threads moderated by male volunteer hobbyists who have a minimum of a one-year review posting history with TER. There are thousands of pages with discussion threads ranging from political issues to solicitations of opinions on various non-prostitution matters. A significant portion of space on the various boards is taken up by discussions of ethical practices in hobbyist–provider relations. Many discussions revolve around efforts to reduce the societal stigma attached to engaging in the hobby. Topics frequently include hobbyists who admit to falling in love with providers and who attempt to create relationships that go beyond the fee-for-service arrangement, as well as personal life stories that drive clients to seek advice from providers who are seen as relationship experts of sorts. Unprotected sex or extreme sexual practices are frowned upon and efforts to eliminate words such as whore or john from prostitution discourse are common; in addition, hobbyists who write disparagingly of providers are often met with collective disapproval from other hobbyists. Hobbyists who come to the verbal rescue of providers have been given the term “White Knight” and are sometimes ridiculed by minor factions of members determined to prevent the discussion boards from becoming dominated by the providers. The site members who participate on the discussion boards were of primary interest to this study.

## OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

While much of the previous research on customers of prostitutes has focused men who purchased sexual services from street prostitutes (e.g., Freund et al. 1991; Høigård and Finstad

1992; Monto and McRee 2005), the present study focuses on 584 “hobbyists” who solicit ISSP through a review website, and whose experiences with said providers occur in an indoor setting. The primary purpose of this study is to describe the attitudes, behaviors, motives, and background characteristics of this formerly inaccessible group of customers. The study employs an American convenience sample of 584 men gathered from the discussion boards of the review website The Erotic Review.com ([www.theeroticreview.com](http://www.theeroticreview.com)). These men responded to requests by the first author to complete a thorough questionnaire on their background characteristics, behaviors, and motives for seeking prostitutes. Similar to other studies of this largely hidden population, the sample is not representative of the global majority of commercial sex customers; however, the study provides insight in to the characteristics and behaviors of some of the most committed “hobbyists” within the burgeoning on-line community of customers and providers who negotiate their real-life sexual encounters on-line. In particular, the following questions are explored:

1. What are the reported sexual behaviors of the customers?
2. What are the motives of customers for seeking out prostitutes?
3. What do customers seek in a provider?
4. What advantages do customers perceive in using ISSP over other types of prostitutes?

## METHOD

### Participants

The target population was an American sample of adult men ( $N = 584$ ) who were paying members of the review site and who read and/or posted reviews of the ISSP on the site. The inclusion criteria of survey participants were the following: (1) adult males over 18 years of age; (2) registered users with verifiable VIP usernames on the ISSP review website; (3) readers of one or more of the discussion groups located on the ISSP review website; and (4) willingness to provide informed consent. Respondents were motivated to participate largely by curiosity and by courtesy toward the first author who had obtained written consent from the review site administrators, and who provided psychosexual advice anonymously pro bono for three years under the username “The Love Goddess” on one of the website’s discussion boards.

### Procedures

Participants were solicited during a 30-day period through an invitational posting placed by the first author every seven days on the 43 discussion boards of the review site. Requests for participation contained relevant information as to the purpose of the study and a request for those interested to send a private message (PM) through the site’s Private Mail system. A link to the first author’s Private Mail account on the site accompanied each posting. Once a request for the questionnaire was received from a potential participant, the first author checked the username alias in the site’s existing reviewer database. This was done to prevent female service providers and other individuals who did not meet the participant criteria from responding to the survey. A link was sent to qualified participants who then accessed the questionnaire on-line. Participation



was completely anonymous, voluntary, and was not remunerated or compensated in any way. No IP addresses were recorded or made available at any time. All survey participants were provided with an informed consent statement as part of the questionnaire and were treated in accordance with the ethical principles and code of conduct required by the Institutional Review Board of the institution supporting the study.

## Measures

The simple frequencies reported are selected from a 104-item instrument intended to provide comprehensive information on this elusive population of hobbyists. Questions were designed to address sexual behavior, attitudes, and beliefs about prostitution, and motives for seeking prostitution. Most were drawn from previous existing studies that focused on customers of street prostitutes (Monto 1999, 2010; Monto and Hotaling 2001; Sawyer and Metz 2008). A separate set of questions developed for the current study focused more specifically on their consumer preferences, including the characteristics they find most attractive and unattractive in providers, their preferences and feelings about providers found on-line, how they use the Internet to find providers, why they prefer the Internet and ISSP, and what in particular is meant by the GFE that is so often mentioned both in reviews and in ads for providers.

## RESULTS

The 584 respondents listed all U.S. states as places of residence with the exception of Alabama, Colorado, Idaho, South Dakota, and Wyoming. Participants ranged in age from 22 to 79 years, with a mean age of 49.5 ( $SD = 10.35$ ). Reported annual income ranged from none to \$300,000, with a mean of \$141,510 ( $M = 141,510$ ,  $Mdn = 100,000$ ,  $SD = 18,000$ ), and the majority of respondents (84.9%) listed their ethnic background as white, with 5.8% East/South Asian, 3.3% black or African American, 3.1% Hispanic, Chicano or Latino, and 2.9% “multi-racial” or “other.” Only two sexual orientation options were reported with 97.3% identifying as heterosexual and 2.7% as bisexual. A majority of the respondents (66.3%) were married or partnered, followed by single men (17.8%), and divorced, separated or widowed men (15.9%). Almost half of the respondents (41.1%) had obtained a graduate degree; 38.0% had completed a bachelor’s degree; 18.0% had attended some college or had vocational training, and 2.9% listed high school or General Educational Development (GED) as their highest completed educational level. Additional demographic characteristics of the participants, including number of sex partners, levels of partner similarity in sexual desire and sexual interest are presented in Table 1.

The average age of first prostitution contact for respondents was 32.2 ( $SD = 11.91$ ) with a range of below 18 to 65 years of age. The vast majority had met prostitutes in hotels or motels (94.5%) and/or at the prostitute’s incall location (82.7%). The majority of respondents (66.3%) had engaged sexually with a prostitute more than one time during the last year, but less than once per month. Once or twice per week was selected by 24.7% of the respondents, while more than 3 times per week was chosen by 2.2%. Thirty-one respondents (5.4%) had met with a prostitute only once during the last year and 8 respondents (1.4%) had not engaged with a prostitute at all during this time period. Penile–vaginal coitus with condom was the most frequent activity (96.6%) ever engaged in with a prostitute, followed by fellatio without condom (96.2%), deep

**TABLE 1**  
Participant Characteristics (*N* = 584)

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Age	
20–29	3.1
30–39	16.9
40–49	29.9
50–59	33.8
60–69	14.6
70–79	1.7
Ethnicity	
White	84.9
East/South Asian	5.8
Black or African American	3.3
Hispanic, Chicano, or Latino	3.1
Multi-racial/Other	2.9
Highest completed education	
High school or GED	2.9
Some college or vocational training	18.0
Bachelor's degree	38.0
Graduate degree	41.1
Sexual orientation	
Heterosexual	97.3
Bisexual	2.7
Marital status	
Married/Partnered	66.3
Single	17.8
Divorced/Separated/Widowed	15.9
Work status	
Working full time	80.5
Working part time	4.5
Retired/Other	15.0
Total number of sex partners in last 12 months	
Less than 5 partners	26.9
5–10 partners	35.1
11–20 partners	25.2
More than 20 partners	12.7
Percentage of unpaid partners in last 12 months	65.2
Frequency of sex with anyone during the last 12 months	
Less than once a month	9.1
Once a month	24.0
2–3 times per month	26.9
Once a week	20.9
2–3 times per week	14.0
More than 3 times per week	4.8
Unpaid partner's similarity of sexual interests	
Very similar	9.3
Somewhat similar	29.9
Somewhat different	29.0
Very different	31.8

(Continued)

**TABLE 1**  
Continued

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Levels of partner sexual desire	
I am much more interested	58.9
I am somewhat more interested	17.3
Equally interested	14.7
Partner is somewhat more interested	5.8
Partner is much more interested	3.3

kissing with tongue (94.9), cunnilingus (94.2%), and manual masturbation without condom (91.4%). Respondents reported that the most frequent sexual activity conducted with a prostitute was penile–vaginal coitus with condom (39.9%), followed by fellatio without condom (32.6%). Remaining frequencies concerning activities with all prostitutes are reported in Table 2.

Table 3 presents survey responses to 13 statements intended to reflect possible motives for seeking prostitutes. When combining both levels of agreement, the most frequently endorsed item by those who agreed *strongly* or agreed *somewhat* with the statement *I like to be with a woman who really likes sex* (98.7%). The second most frequently endorsed item was *I like to be with a woman who likes to act very uninhibited or horny*, with 97.4% agreeing *strongly* or *somewhat*. The level of agreement for the third most frequent statement was *I am excited by the idea of making contact with a prostitute* (86.4%), followed by *I like to have a variety of sexual partners* (86%), and *I want a different kind of sex partner than my wife or regular partner does* (66.9%).

Almost half the respondents (45%) had been using the Internet for over 5 years in order to locate providers. About one-third (33.2%) had used the Internet for 2–5 years to find ISSP; 10.8% had used the Internet for 1–2 years, and 11.0% had used the Internet for less than one year to find providers. The vast majority of respondents (81.8%) preferred finding ISSP by reading reviews on provider review sites. While 27.2% did not care, 71.3% preferred the services of independently operating providers to escort agency services (1.6%). About one-third of the respondents (33.8%) had engaged with over 30 ISSP to date.

As mentioned previously, content analyses of review sites as well as two other small studies of customers who solicit ISSP, show a preference among customers for a GFE. Many of our findings show such an emphasis as well. When asked about the most attractive characteristics in ISSP, 83.6% of the respondents chose *Happy and cheerful personality*, while 78.1% selected *Beautiful and healthy appearance*. More than two-thirds (72.0%) chose *Acts like a girlfriend and not like a prostitute*, and 67% selected *Enthusiasm in trying a variety of sexual activities*. The most disappointing physical characteristics of ISSP were *Bad oral/genital hygiene* (85.2%), *Too dissimilar from photo/description* (73.2%), and *Smoker* (54.1%). In terms of negative behaviors in ISSPs, respondents chose *Rushes session* (81.3%), *Takes phone calls during the session* (81.1%); *Emotionally cold toward customer* (79.4%), and *Businesslike demeanor* (78.5%), items that may imply the opposite of girlfriend experience. When asked about their preference for ISSP over other kinds of prostitutes, 59.3% chose *They act like girlfriends and not like prostitutes*, while 51.1% selected *They are beautiful and appear healthy*. Remaining items of interest are presented in Table 4.

**TABLE 2**  
Behaviors and Preferences with All Types of Prostitutes ( $N=584$ )

<i>Item</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Age at first experience with prostitute	
Under 18	8.9
19–25	31.6
26–30	11.6
31–40	23.8
41–50	14.2
51–65	8.9
Locations of experiences with prostitutes	
In a hotel/motel	95.8
In her incall location/friend's place	83.9
In her home	67.7
In a brothel/massage parlor	58.9
In respondent's home	37.0
In a car	21.9
In park/street/outdoor public space	10.8
About how often did you have sex with a prostitute during last year?	
Never	1.4
Only one time	5.4
Less than once per month	66.3
Once or twice per week	24.7
More than 3 times per week	2.2
Sexual activity ever engaged in with a prostitute? ( $N=576$ )	
Penile–vaginal coitus (with condom)	96.6
Fellatio (without condom)	96.2
Deep kissing with tongue	94.9
Cunnilingus	94.2
Manual masturbation (without condom)	91.4
Fellatio (with condom)	85.8
Using sex toys	61.5
Anal sex	53.4
Troilism (Two women, one man)	48.8
Penile–vaginal coitus (without condom)	36.0
Other	72.0
Sexual activity engaged in most often with a prostitute ( $N=576$ )	
Penile–vaginal coitus (with condom)	39.9
Fellatio (without condom)	32.6
Cunnilingus	11.1
Other	16.5
Do you have an “all-time favorite” (ATF)?	
Yes	30.0
No	70.0
Have you ever fallen in love or become emotionally attached to a provider?	
Yes	40.6
No	59.4
Outside of tips or gifts related strictly to the session, have you ever given extra cash or material goods?	
Yes	52.7
No	47.3

(Continued)

**TABLE 2**  
Continued

<i>Item</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Could you marry an actively working provider?	
Yes	37.9
No	62.1
Could you marry a former provider?	
Yes	82.7
No	17.3

A number of our items sought to shed more light on what was meant by the girlfriend experience. Table 5 presents responses when customers were asked, *what makes a GFE?* The most commonly selected item was *Acts like a girlfriend and not a prostitute at all* (80.2%), followed by *romantic and tender toward you* (78.5%) and *happy and cheerful personality* (75.3%). While research on arrested customers of street prostitutes shows that lack of time and the desire to avoid the obligations of conventional relationships are often identified as motives (Monto, 2000), many of the respondents in the study preferred relationships with providers that mirror those of conventional non-remunerative sex. For example, as shown in Table 2, 30.0% of respondents reported having an *all time favorite* or ATF whom they see exclusively, and 40.6% reporting having *fallen in love or become emotionally attached* to a provider. Over half (52.7%) reported having given gifts to providers outside of their sexual exchanges, and over one-third reported that they could marry an actively working (37.9%) or former (82.7%) provider.

**TABLE 3**  
Motives for Seeking Prostitutes ( $N=567$ )

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Agree Strongly</i>	<i>Agree Somewhat</i>	<i>Disagree Somewhat</i>	<i>Disagree Strongly</i>
I have difficulty meeting women who are not nude dancers or prostitutes	9.9%	17.3%	22.1%	50.6%
I think most women find me unattractive physically	5.7%	21.2%	36.6%	36.5%
I want a different kind of sex than my wife or regular partner does	35.2%	31.7%	16.5%	16.6%
I am shy and awkward when I am trying to meet a woman	16.1%	32.0%	23.7%	28.1%
I would rather have sex with a prostitute than have a conventional relationship with a woman	9.7%	26.5%	30.3%	33.5%
I am excited by the idea of making contact with a prostitute	33.3%	53.1%	9.9%	3.7%
I don't have the time for a conventional relationship	14.0%	27.1%	23.0%	35.9%
I don't want the responsibilities of a conventional relationship	20.5%	31.7%	15.4%	32.4%
I like to have a variety of sexual partners	45.3%	40.7%	10.6%	3.4%
I like to be in control when I am having sex	6.4%	36.6%	46.9%	10.1%
I like to be with a woman who really likes sex	84.4%	14.3%	0.9%	0.4%
I like to be with a woman who likes to act very uninhibited and horny	71.7%	25.7%	2.5%	0.2%
I need to have sex immediately when I am aroused	6.2%	33.6%	39.5%	20.7%

**TABLE 4**  
 Preferences and Attitudes toward ISSP (*N*=567)

<i>Item</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Length of time using Internet to find ISSP	
Less than one year	11.0
1–2 years	10.8
2–5 years	33.2
Over 5 years	45.0
Most preferred way of finding providers on Internet	
Reading reviews on provider review sites	81.8
Participating in discussion boards on provider review sites	8.1
Going directly to provider mall sites and on-line escort directories	5.1
Other	5.0
Preference for escort agency service vs. independent provider	
Independent provider	71.3
Escort agency	1.6
Does not matter	27.2
Payment of membership to a review site	
Yes	81.5
No	18.5
Ever written a review of provider	
Yes	89.1
No	10.9
Total lifetime number of ISSP engaged with sexually	
1–10	27.5
11–20	26.3
21–30	12.3
Over 30	33.8
Most attractive characteristics in ISSP	
Happy and cheerful personality	83.6
Beautiful and healthy appearance	78.1
Acts like a girlfriend and not like a prostitute	72.0
Enthusiasm in trying a variety of sexual activities	67.0
Romantic and tender toward customer	63.3
Superb sexual technique	52.4
Ability to focus on customer's any needs	37.2
Intellectual and analytical problem solver	30.5
Other	26.3
Most disappointing physical characteristics in ISSP	
Bad oral/genital hygiene	85.2
Too dissimilar from photo/description	73.2
Smoker	54.1
Height/weight issues	49.2
Too much make-up	45.0
Aging face/body	30.0
Obvious plastic surgery	29.8
Tattoos/body modification	26.5
No make-up at all	3.2
Most negative behaviors in ISSP	
Rushes session	81.3
Takes phone calls during the session	81.1

(Continued)

**TABLE 4**  
Continued

<i>Item</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Emotionally cold toward customer	79.4
Business-like demeanor focused on money	78.5
Smokes during the session	60.8
Talks at length and reduces sexual activity	36.0
Refuses to engage in requested sexual acts	32.3
Preference for ISSP over other kinds of prostitutes	
They act like girlfriends and not like prostitutes	59.3
They are beautiful and appear healthy	51.1
They have happy and cheerful personalities	42.3
They are romantic and tender toward customer	36.2
They are more enthusiastic in trying a variety of sexual activities	31.6
They have superb sexual technique	28.0
They have the ability to focus on customer's needs	25.0
They are intellectual and analytical problem solvers	19.6
Other	7.9

**TABLE 5**  
Desired Characteristics of a GFE Provider (*N* = 567)

<i>Item</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Acts like a girlfriend and not like a prostitute at all	80.2
Romantic and tender toward client	78.5
Happy and cheerful personality	75.3
Enthusiasm in trying a variety of sexual activities	66.0
Beautiful and healthy appearance	51.9
Ability to focus on client's any needs	48.5
Superb sexual technique	44.8
Other	30.8

## DISCUSSION

The present study focuses on 584 “hobbyists” who solicit ISSP through a review website, and whose experiences with said providers occur in an indoor setting. Findings indicate that for many of these men, companionship, emotion, and relationships are important and desired aspects of the exchange. In contrast to customers of street prostitutes who are disproportionately likely to engage in fellatio (Monto 1999, 2001) the sexual behavior of these regular consumers is similar to individuals involved in conventional non-remunerative sexual relationships. When asked what activities they had *ever* participated in with a prostitute and the activities they had participated in *most often*, customers of ISSP most often selected penile–vaginal coitus. Fellatio without a condom, cunnilingus, and deep kissing with tongue rounded out the top four activities. These are all common aspects of non-remunerative sexual behavior, according to nationally representatives

studies, which also find penile–vaginal coitus as the most frequent practiced sexual activity (Laumann et al. 1994; Michael et al. 1994). A preference for the most culturally conventional sex acts can also be contrasted with their relatively infrequent preference for anal sex. While 53.4% of respondents have engaged in anal insertive sex at least once, only 1.6% reported this as the activity most often engaged in with a prostitute.

Findings also show that the majority of respondents in the study sought providers who could replicate both the physical and the affective aspects of a non-remunerative intimate relationships or the GFE. When explaining their preference for ISSP over other kinds of prostitutes, the most commonly selected response was “acts like a girlfriend and not a prostitute at all.” Additionally, significant proportions of respondents reported having had an exclusive relationship with a provider, falling in love with a provider, and buying gifts for a provider outside of the prostitution exchange. Bernstein (2001, 2007a, 2007b) has claimed that customers are seeking real and reciprocal erotic interactions, and that the GFE is a version of bounded authenticity that emulates aspects of conventional relationships but includes limits accepted by both parties. Kern (2001) also asserted that those in search of “girlfriend sex” defined their sexual experience based on the provider’s behavioral attitudes and her ability to establish a social bond.

The current study also provides an indication of what is meant by clients when they refer to a GFE. These qualities include “acting like a girlfriend and not a prostitute at all,” being “romantic and tender,” and having a “happy and cheerful personality.” Conversely, providers who rushed sessions or acted emotionally cold were turn-offs to respondents. In fact, these variables were chosen as more unfavorable than the provider’s refusal to engage in particular sexual acts.

At first glance, the idea that the client is interested not only in the sexual body of the provider but her friendship, companionship, and partnership in experiencing mutual pleasure as well may seem reassuring to those concerned about the objectification of women and the tendency to see them only as sexual bodies. However, the challenging performance now required from providers means that they must not only sell various sex acts but also persuade the client that they are personally interested in him, even amid the obvious contradiction of payment. This task of emotional labor requires more than just physical access granted by the provider. For every encounter, she is expected to manifest genuine feelings of affection toward the client, or she must act very convincingly as though she is doing so. Failure to communicate her emotional interest in the client will result in the perception that she is not a provider of the GFE.

In terms of motives for seeking prostitutes, an overwhelming majority of respondents indicated a preference for a woman who really likes sex, and subsequently for a woman who acts uninhibited or “horny.” While these items do not specifically mention prostitutes, the third most frequently endorsed statement was that they are excited by the idea of making contact with a prostitute. These responses are generally consistent with the motive describe earlier of seeing the prostitute as a particularly sexual woman. The negative concomitant of this motive (i.e., seeing the prostitute as a dirty whore), does not seem to characterize our respondents and is inconsistent with the girlfriend experience sought by many of them.

These three statements were followed in order by the desire for a variety of sexual partners and wanting a different kind of sex than was desired by their wife or significant other. Monto’s (1999) study found similarly ordered endorsements among customers of street prostitutes. Monto and Julka (2009) suggest that these preferences point to a self-focused sexuality more associated with consumer behavior than intimate relationships. While that may be true for their



sample of customers of street prostitutes, it is clear that consumer behavior and intimacy are not mutually exclusive among the hobbyists we studied.

Foa and Foa (1974) point out that multiple categories can be seen as resources for exchange, including love, status, information, money, goods, and services. Sexual behavior, like all other behavior, is governed by social norms. The exchange of love for love is generally more consistent with normative expectations than the exchange of money for love or sexual services (Foa and Foa 1974; Prasad 1999). The 584 respondents who answered our questions represent a challenge to conventional norms and to many stereotypes regarding the customers of prostitutes. While many of the motives of these men for seeking out prostitutes are similar to those of men who seek street prostitutes, the emphasis is on having a girlfriend experience while engaging temporarily with a woman who presents herself as sexually responsive, uninhibited, and available. The model of the receptive prostitute who passively accepts the customer as the appetitive male is discarded in favor of a woman who claims that she too is in search of sexual satisfaction and excitement. The appearance of mutuality may serve to reduce the stigma customers might feel as “tricks” or as “johns.” To these customers, the GFE is not a fantasy, nor is it a provider acting out a performance. Perhaps the GFE is the latest version of self-deception necessary for customers to maintain the fantasy that the prostitute derives enjoyment from the sexual encounter despite the dissonant evidence presented by payment; or, perhaps the GFE provider is a woman in her putative sexual prime.

A number of researchers have previously emphasized the desire for power and control that underlie many of the motives for seeking out prostitutes. The mutuality and reciprocity of the GFE desired by our respondents would seem inconsistent with such an emphasis. However, it is important to recognize that respondents seek an idealized version of a girlfriend who wants to have sex when and how the customer wants it, who cares about his interests and needs while making few emotional demands of him, who appears how he wants her to appear, and who comes to climax when he makes the effort to bring her there. Despite the appearance of mutuality, the dynamics of power and control may still be present in these encounters.

Although this study provides insight into the growing population of heterosexual clients who seek indoor prostitution by using the Internet, several important limitations and considerations need to be acknowledged. Due to the method of soliciting participants for the survey, all respondents were readers of discussion boards on The Erotic Review website. Discussion board participants represent only about 1% of all male members of the entire site user population. Hence, this sample may not be representative of Internet hobbyists in general or even users of the review website in particular. In addition, to better represent the majority of persons who use the site, any female members who use the site to contact female providers were not solicited, nor were readers of the discussion board focusing on transgender service providers.

It is important to recognize that the site itself is part of the sociocultural environment in which the respondents come to understand prostitution and develop their beliefs. It is conceivable that the amicable provider–hobbyist communication on the discussion boards of the review website has influenced the respondents to such a degree that many conceive of the concupiscent GFE provider as the default model for sex workers. Many respondents have no experience with street prostitutes or trafficked women. It is also possible that respondents engage in idealizations of all prostitutes in the attempt to justify their own behavior. The discussion boards on the site offer contacts with providers who willingly participate and to some extent encourage interactions in which paid sexual experiences are seen as normal, as long as they conform to experiences

labeled as GFE. The preference for a GFE provider helps the customer reject the stigma attached to paying for sex, since the behaviors involved in the GFE are often part of non-remunerative romantic relationships. The customer adheres to a normative order in which asking for a GFE is defined as compatible with a nonstigmatized identity (Goffman 1963).

The respondents in the present study were largely white, middle-aged, and married men, who reported annual incomes of six figures. In contrast to other study populations, minority groups are underrepresented in the sample (cf. Brewer et al. 2008; Freund et al. 1991; Monto 1999). Moreover, a surprisingly high proportion had post-graduate degrees (41%). Clearly, these respondents represent a privileged group of men with the disposable income, time, and Internet access necessary to make a “hobby” out of pursuing Internet Sexual Service Providers.

The introduction to this study identified seemingly contradictory findings in the current research on male customers of female prostitutes. Several studies suggest that customers participate in prostitution as a substitute for non-remunerative sexual relations (e.g. Milrod and Weitzer 2012), while others suggest that customers simply want to use the provider’s body for sexual release. The current survey shows that the majority of respondents who contract with ISSP for sexual services by reading and posting reviews on a prostitute review site desire engagement with a provider who offers the GFE, an experience that is intended to represent some sexual and affective aspects of a conventional male–female relationship. In addition, a majority of these customers engage in penile–vaginal coitus with ISSP more often than in any other sex acts.

It is clear that the Internet has brought new transactional dimensions to prostitution and to the commodification of sexuality. There seem to be similarities in motive but differences in performance expectations between street prostitution and the encounters reported by our respondents. The aim of this study has been to explore the behavior and preferences of men who negotiate paid indoor sexual encounters over the Internet, a practice that is becoming more common. Future studies are needed to understand the behaviors and motivations of this emerging population, particularly in comparison to men exposed to the same opportunities but who choose not to pay for sex.

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