

## **Beyond the client: exploring men's sexual scripting**

Chiara Bertone and Raffaella Ferrero Camoletto

### **Abstract**

Sexual scripting theory, with its de-essentializing potential, is a powerful weapon to dismantle simplistic, classificatory, and derogatory understandings of men as clients of commercial sex, allowing to explore how making sense of paying for sex is an everyday accomplishment for men in the scripting of heterosexual masculinity.

Drawing upon middle-aged and elderly Italian men's accounts of their heterosexual, sexual biographies, we point to directions along which the potential of scripting theory can further unfold in research on purchasing sex, by considering scripting as a situational, biographical and boundary-drawing process.

Keywords: clients, masculinities, heterosexuality, sexual scripts, life course.

### **Introduction**

Setting the boundaries around commercial sex is for men a "routine accomplishment embedded in everyday interaction" (West and Zimmerman 1987, 125). In order to explore this core aspect in the doing - in particular - of heterosexual masculinity, this article draws upon the concept of sexual scripting, the interactionist perspective on sexuality developed by Gagnon and Simon (1973).

A sexual script is "an organized cognitive schema" that is used to recognize a situation as sexual, to name the actors involved, and to plot the behavior (Gagnon 1990, p. 6), defining the who, with whom, what, when, where, and how of sexual conduct. Criticizing the risk of reducing sexual scripts to a fixed set of instructions, however, Gagnon and Simon clarify that scripting is a dynamic process "involved in learning the meaning of internal states, organising the sequences of specifically sexual acts, decoding novel situations, setting the limits on sexual responses and linking meanings from nonsexual aspects of life to specifically sexual experience" (Gagnon and Simon 1973, p. 17).

In this chapter we discuss how conceptualizing the purchasing of sex as a scripting practice can become a fruitful perspective to address the complex, dynamic and situational construction of the meanings of sex for sale within broader changing configurations of gender and sexuality, beyond simplistic and derogatory understandings of men as clients of commercial sex.

### **Scripting sexuality: feminist engagements**

Throughout their ground-breaking work in developing critical perspectives on sexuality and heterosexuality, Jackson and Scott (2010a) have been arguing for the need to rediscover the radically anti-essentialist potential of social interactionist perspectives, where sexual scripting theory has its roots.

Conceptualizing sexuality as a social construction, Gagnon and Simon (1973) developed, a comprehensive critique to the repressive hypothesis, as Foucault (1976) will later name it, i.e. the

assumption of the existence of an innate sexual drive that gets constrained and oriented by social norms, to which they oppose the notion of sexual scripts.

Gagnon and Simon (1973; Simon and Gagnon 1986) conceive sexual scripts as multidimensional, distinguishing analytically three interwoven levels: cultural, interpersonal and intrapsychic. At the cultural level, narratives provide instructional guides for defining the boundaries of what is sexual and making sense of individual experiences as sexual (e.g. when paying a bill is socially considered as having sexual implications).

The key contribution of Simon and Gagnon's interactional perspective lies in the attention they devote to the interpersonal level, the situational production of sexuality in everyday interactions, "where wider cultural scenarios are interactively reworked, negotiated or contested" (Jackson and Scott 2010b: 815). For instance, a commercial sexual interaction can be redefined in the interaction as an intimate relationship (Bernstein 2010).

Finally, the intrapsychic level of scripting outlines that also sexual attitudes and feelings, including desire, are socially constructed. "The motivational elements that produce arousal or at least a commitment to the activity" (Gagnon and Simon 1973: 14) do not derive from the inner body but emerge through a reflexive engagement with social experience, and are part of the construction of a social self. We will see, for instance, how the socially constructed notion of male sexual desire as a biologically driven urge is embodied by men.

Considering the concept of 'scripting' as referring to a process, we can interpret it as an 'accounting practice', intended as a regular day-to-day practice of reproducing social reality while making sense of it. The notion of accountability as it has been developed under the ethno-methodological perspective on gender (Kessler and McKenna 1978; West and Zimmerman 1987), makes it possible to conceive sexual practices in performative terms, as a way of seeing gender, sexuality and heterosexuality as "a 'doing' rather than a 'being'" (West and Zimmerman 2009, p. 114).

This means that, rather than investigating which sexual scripts are available to which men in which situations, we need to explore how people do gender by scripting their sexual experiences, that is by enacting certain practices while also assigning to them a socially understandable sexual meaning, i.e. making them accountable. In more stable and traditional social settings, the way people make their practices accountable is more taken for granted, implicitly embedded in the practices themselves (Simon and Gagnon 1986). In settings characterised by greater conflicts and complexity, the reflexive and interpretive processes of scripting tend to become more outspoken. Moreover, sexual scripting as a process that unfolds over time points to an ongoing reinterpretation of one's sexual experiences as a way to make sense of one's biography: their meanings are therefore constructed in relation to other trajectories of their life course. And again, when individuals face situations that they perceive as transgressions in and digressions from their expected life course, they can engage in re-scripting their experiences to achieve biographical consistency under new terms.

### **Male sexual scripts, or scripting masculinities**

The anti-essentialist potential of scripting theory is not always to be found in how the notion of 'sexual scripts' is used in studies on male sexuality. In fact, this notion has been used more in

health-focused studies with a medical or psychological approach than in sociological research, often using quantitative methods to identify the main features of the ‘typical’ or ‘normative’ sexual patterns in heterosexual practices (e.g. Sakaluk et al. 2014; Mahay et al. 2001). Expressions like ‘traditional’, ‘dominant’, or ‘conventional’ male sexual scripts are frequently used to refer to norms of conduct, sets of instructions and motives for behaviour, derived from established models of masculinity entrenched in (local) culture. Moreover, a taken-for-granted connection is generally established between traditional male sexual scripts and hegemonic masculinity (Seal and Ehrhardt 2003; Masters et al. 2013). The risk is that this emphasizes and reifies gender differences and gendered roles (Beres 2014), overlooking not only individual differences, but also situational enactments of sexual scripts. Dworkin and O’Sullivan (2005) shifted the analytical focus from culturally dominant scripts to “how women and men reflexively make sense of or shift current sexual arrangements and experience disjunctures between enacted practices and actual desires” (Dworkin and O’Sullivan 2005: 50-151). The notion of ‘disjuncture’ is crucial to move from the mere endorsement of traditional scripts to explore the mechanisms through which sexual scripts are reproduced and can be negotiated, questioned and changed: in fact, “dominant cultural scripts are not a given, but require maintenance and reinforcement at personal and dyadic levels to persist” (Masters et al. 2013: 410-411).

In our own work on middle-aged and elderly Italian men’s accounts of their heterosexual biographies (Bertone and Ferrero Camoletto 2009), we explored how they produced a biographical consistency by making sense of disruptions between the different levels of sexual scripts in a context in which cultural scenarios deeply changed during their life course. A condition for this exploration was to expand our critical understanding of heterosexuality to the past as well, avoiding assumptions about what a ‘traditional’ male sexual script could be and identifying plurality, complexity and contradictions within the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ cultural scenarios, and exploring the processes of reinterpretation of the past in the light of present experiences.

The men were born between the mid-1930s and the mid-1950s, and could draw upon different cultural scripts in the process of ‘becoming sexual’.. The model of sexuality in marriage was informed by a respectability script where sexuality was primarily aimed at reproduction and at maintaining the couple, and was regulated by the values of commitment and respect. This script implied men's duty to restrain their natural desire for sexual variety to respect their wives, and constructed women as gatekeepers of men’s drives. For men, however, respectability could be combined with a predatory script, which legitimized sexual experiences before and during marriage (the so-called double standard), constructing men as biologically driven hunters, and women as preys, and sex as a means to confirm masculinity by gaining recognition in the homosocial environment of male peer groups. Within this frame, commercial sex was culturally legitimized as a form of male sexual initiation, a central male homosocial experience often shared in small groups, and as a meaningful compensatory extra-marital practice.

Along their life course, these men had to deal with new cultural scenarios, that opened up to a more symmetrical notion of masculinity and femininity and to an ideal of reciprocity in sexual pleasure, both in recreational sex and in couple-bounded experiences. The first of these new scripts is the permissive one, which values sexual interaction in itself, as a pleasure and self-expressive means, for men and women alike. The second one, the intimacy script, conceives sex primarily as a way of creating and maintaining a sense of emotional closeness and of mutual

disclosure within the couple; boundaries and rules are contingently constructed within the relationship. Rather than seeing a reproduction of the old cultural scenarios or a consistent shifting to the new ones as frames for making sense of their sexual experiences, in many men's stories we found a patching together of elements of different cultural scripts, where often new vocabularies drawn upon the ideal of intimacy were integrated within older frames.(Bertone and Ferrero Camoletto 2009).

### **Scripting the client: notion of sexual scripts in research on men purchasing heterosexual sex**

In a context of widespread criminalizing and pathologizing understandings of 'the client', research exploring the meanings men attach to their experiences of commercial sex can open up a critical space. To demonstrate the plurality in motivations is a way to challenge the view of commercial sex as an expression of men's oppression of women. However, it does not actually per se prevent the risk of contributing to the construction of clients as a perverse type (Kulick 2005), when such a plurality is connected to taxonomies of personality types. Beyond typologies, there is now research showing the complex intertwining of motivations in clients' accounts, and their situational and life course variability (Peng 2007; Sanders 2008b; Frank 2010).

Moreover, research has identified elements of continuity between interactions in commercial sex and in those relationships that are conventionally defined as non-commercial (Milrod and Monto 2012), and has explored the relations between changing experiences of buying sexual services and more general changes in practices of intimacy and sexuality (Bernstein 2007).

If men's practices as clients are not to be considered apart from men's sexual and intimate practices in general, the road seems to be open for a further development of a dialogue between research on clients and research on masculinities. In some attempts to integrate masculinity studies in research on clients, however, we can find some shortcomings in the use of "male sexual scripts". The most important one is the tendency to measure men's plural and changing experiences against a rather monolithic, a-contextual and taken-for-granted conflation of hegemonic masculinity with 'dominant' or 'traditional' sexual scripts. Other forms of masculinity, e.g. the "fragile" or "consumer" masculinities identified by Joseph and Black (2012) are expected to measure up against this model (see also Huysamer and Boonzaier 2015). As a remarkable exception, Kong (2015) shows instead how men struggle to make sense of their sex purchase by dealing not only with a plurality of cultural scripts on male sexuality, but also with their shifting hegemonies.

The most articulated attempt to apply the notion of sexual scripts to male experiences of sex purchase has been made by Teela Sanders (2008a, 2008b). She shows the commonalities between the sexual scripts men enact as clients and what she defines as "heterosexual male sexual scripts", and by this she problematizes the conflation between commercial and impersonal sex, arguing that regular clients frame their experience by largely drawing upon scripts about emotional intimacy and relational involvement, and an ideal of respect for women.

However, inheriting some of the shortcomings of the literature on male sexual scripts, she measures the "client script" against a "traditional male sexual script" conceived as "a set of rules and behavioural expectations" (Sanders 2008b: 95) that are taken as given rather than clearly defined. Her analysis of clients' accounts shows instead their complex reworking and patchworking of elements of different – older and newer – cultural scripts framing their heterosexual sexual encounters within different understandings of gender relations, pleasure, intimacy and closeness.

References to emotional closeness, for instance, can evoke expectations drawn from an idea of respectable couple relationships where women are assigned the task of sustaining a comforting emotional environment for men, or from a more symmetrical understanding of intimacy as based on the recognition of the partners' subjectivity and on mutual disclosure of one's authentic emotions. Likewise, the notion of respect can, but does not necessarily imply, a recognition of subjectivity and entitlement to agency.

Sander's analysis proves the potential of scripting theory in moving beyond an understanding of diversity in terms of clients' typologies, and, indeed, beyond current constructions of "the client" as a heuristic category. There are several directions, we argue, along which this potential can further unfold.

*Scripting as a situational process.* If we move away from a view of scripts as a given set of rules, but look at them as situated accomplishments - the interactional level of scripting - we can explore the processes by which scripts are reproduced and upheld in everyday interaction, thereby unveiling their composite, mobile and situational character. Exploring in particular homosociality as a context of production of meanings, studies on clients' online forums have identified them as spaces where "a localised form of brotherhood" is created (Sanders 2008b; Williams, Lyons and Ford 2008), and have shown how shared meanings are situationally constructed and "gendered subjectivity is continually reimagined and reinscribed" (Katsulis 2010, 210).

*Scripting as a biographical process: the time dimension.* An important aspect of sexual scripts, Jackson and Scott (2010) argue, is a shift in focus from how the past determines the present, to how the present reshapes the past. The meaning attached to a sexual and emotional encounter with a sex worker is related to how this situation is placed in a men's biography. Moreover, in order to secure biographical consistency, men can reinterpret the same experience by mobilising different scripts in different times. The fact that, in the corpus of research we have described, men are recruited as clients, and the interviews mainly focus on their experiences of purchasing sex, only partially allows to understand how meanings of paying for sex are defined, and redefined in time, in relation to other sexual and relational experiences, and more broadly to men's other life course trajectories.

*Scripting as a boundary-drawing process.* Applying a broader focus on sexual biographies could also help in exploring the ways men create meaningful distinctions in the relations they are involved in, drawing boundaries around what counts as sexual, emotional, affective, and economic. What Zelizer (2005) calls the ongoing relational work of boundary-making between

commercial and non-commercial sexual interactions can be seen as an accounting practice, which is most intensively performed in social settings where boundaries are not self-evident (Milrod and Weitzer 2012).

### **Scripting boundaries in men's sexual biographies: an empirical research**

In our research on middle-aged and elderly men's sexual biographies the 36 in-depth interviews included a set of questions addressing opinions about, and experiences of, paying for sex, but both emerged mostly spontaneously in the flow of men's accounts (Bertone and Ferrero Camoletto 2009; Ferrero Camoletto and Bertone 2010).<sup>1</sup>

For the illustrative purpose of this chapter, we selected four sexual biographies that epitomize the complexity and plurality of the scripting processes through which a seemingly similar experience the four men had (having sex with a prostitute in their youth as part of their sexual socialisation) acquires different meanings in relation to men's life-course experiences, and the boundaries they themselves draw between commercial and non-commercial sex.

#### *Purchasing sex within the double standard*

The first two stories that we will present concern men engaged in consistently reproducing the sexual scripts they were socialized to, through an ongoing process of scripting by which they integrate potentially breaching experiences within a strong sense of biographical continuity and an unquestioned and highly naturalized masculinity.

Mariano, 58 years old with a lifelong job (as a metal-worker) and marriage, frames his experiences with commercial sex within what he assumes to be the expected male development pattern (a youthful predatory phase replaced by respectable conduct in the adult phase) mixed with a double standard (a combination of predatory and respectable scripts).

In his sexual biography, commercial sex is first of all defined by the kind of partner involved; 'professional women' working in brothels are presented as different from spouses. Youthful experiences of having sex with a prostitute were both a training experience and a natural outlet for his sexual urges before settling down at 16 with a fiancée that turned into his wife when he was 25:

*I was 15. I started to have normal sex very early [with my girlfriend] [...] Before getting the second one for free, so to say, it was with those friends of mine that we went for commercial sex. [...] I found this woman with whom we went three or four times, she was a sort of a teacher, she taught a little, it was not only the sex act, then the second time it was better and the third a great success. Then I got engaged and I gave up those*

---

<sup>1</sup> The qualitative data (150 men's and women's sexual biographies) have been generated through two overlapping research projects on adult men's and women's sexuality in Italy, carried out between 2005 and 2009: a national mixed-method national research on sexual attitudes and behavior (ISI2006) and a follow-up qualitative research on middle-aged and elderly men and women in Piedmont. Here we draw on a subset of 36 respondents selected through a purposive snowball sampling method, seeking as much variation as possible in relation to some key sociodemographic variables (for example, education, marital and relationship status, religious identification). The interviews of the national project were conducted in four regions representative of Italy's macro-zones: Northwest, Northeast, Centre, South and the islands.

*experiences. [...] partly because you needed money, partly because it was simpler to go with girlfriends... And that was the end of that.*

In Mariano's account, money is a crucial symbolic resource in making a distinction between commercial sex and respectable sex in marriage: the latter is 'for free' and 'simpler'.

A second boundary-making element is evoked later on by Mariano: the distinction between 'normal sex' and other practices, namely oral sex. Both before and after marriage, he avails himself of commercial sex ('a few times', as he says) as an occasional 'escape' or 'transgression' from the normative pathway, legitimized by his wife's inability to respond to his need for pleasurable fellatio.

*Some physical outlet with some professional women [...] [After marriage] I had some... some flings... because, as I said, till now my wife has never been so good at some things. [...] I need something that my wife cannot give me because she's not able to do it. I cannot do it by myself, so what should I do? [...] So there are opportunities and I take them, they cost what they cost, but...*

Mariano justifies his transgression by naturalizing his desire for sexual variety, expressed in his search not only for "other sexual practices" beyond vaginal intercourse, but also in his attraction towards different bodily shapes ('big tits' or 'long legs', 'blonde' or 'brunette').

In Mariano's use of the double standard cultural script, commercial sex seems to be more legitimized, and safer, than an even occasional extramarital affair, because of the specific expertise of sex workers in meeting men's desires. However, a less outspoken distinction is made: occasional extramarital sex is exposed to the risk of refusal, while commercial sex ensures men's access to the female body and to specific sexual practices.

*Besides those [women] you pay, I have never looked for... like ... I see [a woman], I cultivate her, I have a go, and then perhaps it doesn't work [...] it is not my mentality, having a go anyway and then it might go wrong*

Mariano explains his gradual shift from the double standard to fully complying with the respectable script only as a natural effect of ageing, partially reducing his sexual drive and so re-balancing his marital relationship.

In producing biographical consistency, however, he has to manage the change of cultural scripts with the emergence of intimacy and gender symmetry as frames for understanding sexuality. A strategy to make sense of his refusal of these new frames is referring to his experience as specific for his generation, and different from that of his son, who he criticizes for changing girlfriends every couple of years. What men like Mariano especially need to neutralize in the sexual experiences of their children's generation seems to be the collapsing of the distinction between loose and respectable women, a distinction upon which he has built the legitimacy of his own sexual life.

Guido, a 65-year-old mechanic, married at 26, living in a small southern town, was also sexually socialized through commercial sex, framed within a “double standard” life course combining predatory and respectability scripts without any sense of conflict. His first time paying for intercourse with a prostitute was again a homosocial experience, mediated by an older friend. He naturalizes this experience as expression of a biological drive (*"Like the cock". Do you know what the cock is like? [...] Wham! He jumps on the hen and then in a few seconds he gets off"*). At the same time, he also acknowledges the imperative to become more "experienced" as a cultural norm, shared with his young male friends (*"you do this thing, and you can go and tell the others about it"*), reinforcing the male bonding. He assumes that instead adult masculinity consists in both a transition to marriage, and to respectable sexuality, and in a legitimate ongoing search for physical outlets that do not risk respect for his wife.

Guido defines marital sex by opposition to a kind of sexual practices which are considered “excessive” and disrespectful to one’s wife.

*You don't want to do certain things with your wife... sort of excessive things, you know, because the wife is something you own, you know? If you do something with another person who doesn't belong to you... but with your wife you don't do certain things, you want to have calm sex, you want to be polite [...] we have always had... you do things but we didn't want to do abnormal, you know [...] because when you love someone, you don't want to make her do bad things, you know [...] It's always the man who compels her to do things, and she does what the husband asks her to please her husband [...] Another person you can see her today, tomorrow you don't see her anymore, it's over, she doesn't know me; but if you do that with your wife, it's always bad.*

What makes sex respectable is avoiding crossing over the boundaries of the normality (and normativity) of what Guido calls “calm” or “polite” sex (namely vaginal intercourse in the missionary position), On the other hand, male sexual self-restraint is justified through a mixture of affection and sense of material belonging: respecting one’s wife is both an expression of affective involvement and of a defence of one’s property from wear and tear.

Commercial sex changes its meaning for Guido, from being a legitimate experimentation phase in youth to becoming something less acceptable in adulthood, While the sense of ownership of one’s wife justifies the use of the respectable script, the search for temporary ownership in commercial sex (*"you buy it and do what you want with it"*) is seen as a lack of respect towards women and as a sign of inadequate masculinity.

However, in providing a common frame for both his paid and unpaid extramarital experiences, Guido resorts to sexual practices as another way to set the boundaries between an abusive and a respectable man:

*I have always treated them well. I didn't want to do strange things because I respect woman as women and as human beings. [...] I don't want to treat them as animals. I want to treat them as people as well. [...] Because you can say you did that because you didn't*



*consider her as your woman, or because you wanted to treat her as a slave... no, no, I have always wanted to have polite sex.*

He seems, in the end, to apply the respectable script to both marital and extramarital sexual interactions.

#### *Changing meanings, re-setting boundaries*

In several of the biographies we collected, men engaged in redefining the meanings of their sexual experiences (including purchasing sex) while accounting for them in light of biographical and cultural changes. In their accounts, we can see an attempt to patch together elements of different, older and newer scripts.

Salvo, a teacher living in Southern Italy, aged 62, seems to reproduce in his life's sexual events the previous interviewees' placing of commercial sex within a double standard: commercial sex, experienced as part of sexual socialization in his youthful predatory phase, becomes then an understandable compensation for his sexual frustration (due to his wife's limited sexual willingness) in a respectable marriage. However, moral condemnation, a sense of commitment in marriage and fear of contagion restrain him from actually pursuing this solution.

*Since I had money, I could go to Messina [where the brothels were]. [...] I have never gone to be in peace with my soul, my body and my attitudes. I could have gone, have contracted a disease, tac! I could immediately abandon her, but that's not right this way, even if you're ill, even if you're mistreated... you say no, no, you must go on.*

The break-up of his marriage, however, gives a twist to his biographical narrative, currently marked by a new relationship which is described as fulfilling all his sexual and emotional desires, engendering a sense of wholeness by providing not only sexual frequency and variety, but also emotional involvement and reciprocity in giving pleasure.

In the light of this relationship, previous experiences are recounted, taking distance from the predatory script: purchased and impersonal sex, often enacted under the pressure of the peer group, is described in terms of a meaningless, morally dubious and, in the end, not-so-pleasurable "ta-tà" (Italian onomatopoeia).

*The first time I went to the city with my cousin, I was seventeen, otherwise I used to make love on my own, always! (laughing) [...] And she took it in her mouth, as soon as she took it, "bang, bang, thank you ma'am", I came, and it was over (laughing) [...] I used to go to brothels in the city and...bang! I saw a girl I liked and we clicked, bang! And that was that.. You go there just to have physical release. [...] If you go with friends or with colleagues, you can't turn back. I never turned back [...] It was better to go than not to go, but that's just bang-bang without feeling anything; otherwise you can toss yourself off. Because that way at least you feel something [...] it's better to stay home and ta-tà, ta-tà.*

What is interesting in Salvo's story is his way of dealing with the "old" boundaries in making sense of his new situation, which he presents as a highly eroticized but at the same time "committed" and "healthy" relationship with his new partner, an immigrant woman who left her

job to live with him (implying that he is maintaining her): "*She is a very sweet girl, I get along very well with her, she never says no, always yes*".

We can detect both some elements of the newer scripts in the description of his "laborious" sexual relationship below, requiring attention to the partner's pleasure, and elements of a respectable script in drawing the boundary between a partner and a slut on the basis of which sexual practices he can engage in.

*She does everything for me, and I do everything for her. It is a laborious encounter [...] You don't pay attention to the sexual position, what's interesting is that she comes. This is the couple's trouble, if you don't come, you are just ta-tà, ta-tà, ta-tà. [...] I don't have oral sex, I have never done that... yes, I have done it in her mouth, but when you come, wham! pull out quickly! [...] I don't want her to be a slut, you know, some things are precious.*

Luca, 62, with a secondary school education in a long career in a highly skilled job requiring geographical mobility, is living in a big city in Northern Italy. He appears quite an ideal type of his generation. His first sexual experiences were with a prostitute accompanied by homosocial complicity, he continued with some affairs and then a shotgun wedding at 24 and a long double-standard life: very "normal" sexuality with his wife, great sexual variety with his lovers. However, the meanings attached to these experiences blur the picture, showing a re-interpretation of these acts in the light of newer scripts. Luca takes his distance from a naturalized and predatory masculinity, presenting himself instead as a "sensitive man" who is attentive to more intimate aspects of his relationships with women, including communication and reciprocity.

*I am a peculiar man [...] I make my choice, I evaluate it with regard not to my urges but to my brain. Well, it is not that I must screw her just because she's gorgeous, I am not keen on being a drill  
[...] I take it slowly. If a woman does not get her orgasm, I am not satisfied, because it doesn't make sense for me. If I must put it in only to ejaculate, I don't care. What's important to me is that the intercourse is joyful and satisfying for both.*

The acknowledgement of symmetry and reciprocity in sexual practices (epitomized by sexual initiative) seems at a certain point to be taken to its subversive implications of questioning the gendered double standard (the male chaser vs the female slut), by stating a degendering of sexual positioning:

*I don't think only men are hunters, also women are. [...] In the past they probably would have not done it, they didn't have such an attitude or they did it, but kept it very well hidden. Now they do it openly, they practically make you understand quite quickly; they are no longer afraid of being thought of as easy women, you know. But from men's point of view, at least I am different, but I know friends who say 'Yeah, she's a slut'. I am like her; I am a slut as well, then!*

The story of his marriage reproduces a more straightforward respectability script: he continued to stay with his wife in a "very normal marriage" because of affection and respect, but sex was quite boring (always in the same position, on his initiative, with no discussion), like "*the life of a metalworker*". In recounting his sexual experiences before and outside marriage, he clearly shifts away from the predatory script, establishing some elements of continuity between his first purchased experiences and the subsequent ones with lovers.

Luca recalls his first experience with a prostitute not as one of sexual release with an "*usual whore*", but rather as an encounter with a "*superior*" prostitute, emphasizing the caring relationship she developed with him, generously offering her "*training*" skills without pressure of time or money:

*There was an old prostitute who had been a training-ship [...]. She is really a wonderful person [...] very nice, intellectually well-educated, she was not the usual whore. She was a person with whom you could have a conversation different from 'Come on, hurry up, there is another one waiting', absolutely not [...]. She was a woman... she was a professional, but she did it very well, more than a training-ship she was really a teacher! [laughing]. [...] From her I learnt everything I have enacted in later years with women, because women are different from one another, each case is different [...] I talked about her with some of my dearest friends, describing and evaluating the person more than the act itself. The act could have been done with anyone, but the person deserved a less superficial description than the usual 'slut'. That is, for me she was an artist.*

This is very different from his only negative, disappointing experiences of sex, which were his subsequent attempts with other prostitutes, where he found a money-oriented approach without any real involvement ("*you understand they fake*"): *To carry out this profession for profit, outspokenly, you know, for profit, as they do now, without any professionalism, it's meaningless.*

Even when he says he now goes to night clubs and has asexual interactions with hookers there as he enjoys listening to their life stories, he echoes his caring and unselfish relationship with his first sexual trainer. Thereby, he constructs a sensitive and non-predatory masculinity, although neutralizing, with small comments on his ever-present sexual desire for beautiful women, the potential for emasculating interpretations ("*I am not frigid*", "*I am not a saint*").

*Near my home there are many prostitutes [...] sometimes I stop by... [...] and sometimes it happens that someone asks me for a lift [...] I drive them, they ask 'But don't you want anything?'. I answer 'No, I have just driven you home'. I am not a saint, but I don't want to take advantage of this situation, which is like offering a dinner to exploit someone. I really don't.*

When talking about recreational sex, Luca makes the same clear distinction between the male predator-slut relationship and his relational style requiring that he is really interested in getting to

know the woman, without expecting that she is sexually available in exchange for a dinner or a drive.

*I am annoyed when someone is treated as a slut. I have friends who go out with someone and the same evening they get to know her they try to have sex; I absolutely don't like it, it's not in my DNA to be like that. I rather have dinner with someone once or twice, or go for a walk, what have you, whatever to try to understand what the person is like, because it's useless to deal with someone in such a way because it means I consider her as just a hole.*

Luca's account shows that, in reframing which interactional settings make a woman a slut, men also define what kind of masculinity is enacted: if she is not a hole, then he is not a drill.

## **Conclusion**

A thick description of scripting 'the client' emerges from our empirical material thanks to the fact that our research did not have experiences with buying sex as its main focus, both rather men's sexual biographies generally. Our work hints at the need to consider the dimension of time as part of the scripting: midlife men's biographies offer a particularly suitable case for exploring how these men actively interpret and embody broader transformations in the cultural scenario where commercial sex has deeply changed its meanings, at the intersection of a plurality of sexual and relational trajectories within their life courses.

Such an exploration also calls for further attention to be paid to the patch working of 'old', respectable and predatory scripts, and the 'new' intimate script involved in the emerging hegemonic frame of "bounded intimacy" characterizing men's demand and women's supply in heterosexual commercial sex (Bernstein 2007; Sanders 2008). In the enactment of intimacy in the so-called GFE (girlfriend experience) described by research, we can find various elements echoing, at the same time, Luca's special relationship with his training-ship, Guido's polite sex, Salvo's fulfilling relationship with an economically dependent partner, and also Mariano's respectful relationship with his wife.

Further research would also need to take into greater account how changes in the meanings of commercial sex are related to more structural dimensions, including the precarization of life, which for men has meant the disruption not only of lifelong marriage, but also of a lifelong breadwinner role (Bernstein 2007) .

Finally, the situated dimension of the scripting process brings up the question of the audience men's accounts are developed for and, thereby, of the social bases of production of the scripts. Our work points at the relevance of male homosociality not only when it is outspokenly evoked, but as the implicit audience men feel primarily accountable to, although we could also detect its decentering in some of the developments of the intimacy script (Bertone and Ferrero Camoletto 2009). Uncovering the relative relevance of the client/sex worker interactional setting and of homosocial ones, such as online forums, in the production of clients' accounts of their experiences could prove, we believe, very fruitful in understanding the dynamics and social bases of scripting.

The main contribution of the approach we have proposed to deconstructing "the client" as a perverse type, however, lays in broadening the perspective, and showing how accounts about commercial sex are at the core of scripting masculinity. The experience of paying for sex defines the transition to adult masculinity as a homosocial rite of passage, and is mobilised in order to set the boundaries between different dimensions of men's sexual biographies: what kind of interactional involvement (bodily, emotional, relational, etc.), what kind of motivations (search for physical outlet, for pleasure, for physical closeness, for emotional disclosure, etc.).

The process of scripting masculinity becomes even more visible when men engage in drawing the boundaries of femininity, through what we could name the scripting process of "slutting", that is, the making (and the unmaking) of a woman as a slut. The relational work of defining what makes (or does not make) one's partner a slut emerges, in fact, as a crucial tool for doing different masculinities.

This process is far from resulting in a linear and homogeneous picture of which masculinities are scripted and which boundaries are drawn for the slut/client relation, depending upon how men combine and re-interpret elements of the available scripts: the predatory man sharply distinguished from, but coexisting with, the respectable husband, as in Mariano's case; the respectable man having polite sex also with prostitutes, as in Guido's case; the now intimate man taking his distance from a predatory past, as in Salvo's case. The last case provided by Luca depicts a self-representation of a sensitive man who, by desexualizing his interactions with prostitutes, "de-sluts" them. Luca's case points out, at the same time, the dangers of this "de-slutting" process because it also risks unmaking him as a man. In order to neutralize this risk, he balances his desexualization of relations with hints of a naturalized, ever-present sexual desire which can sustain his masculinity. While undoing a mechanical scripting of masculinity (the always-ready drill) at the cultural and interpersonal level, he leaves unquestioned the naturalized male sex drive at the intrapsychic level.

## References

Beres, M.A. (2014). Points of Convergence: Introducing Sexual Scripting Theory to Discourse Approaches to the Study of Sexuality, *Sexuality & Culture*, 18:76–88.

Bernstein, E. (2010). *Temporarily Yours: Intimacy, Authenticity, and the Commerce of Sex*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bertone, C. and Ferrero Camoletto, R. (2009) 'Beyond the Sex Machine? Sexual Practices and Masculinity in Adult Men's Heterosexual Accounts', *Journal of Gender Studies*, 18(4): 369-386.

Connell, R.W. and Messerschmidt, J.W. (2005). Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept, *Gender & Society*, 19 (6): 829–59.

Dworkin, S. L. and O'Sullivan, L. (2005). Actual versus Desired Initiation Patterns among a Sample of College Men: Tapping Disjunctures within Traditional Male Scripts. *Journal of Sex Research*, 42: 150–158.

Ferrero Camoletto, R. and Bertone, C. (2010). Coming as a man. Pleasure in the construction of Italian men's sexuality. *Italian Studies*, 2: 235-250.

Foucault, M. (1976). *Histoire de la sexualité. La volonté de savoir*, Paris, Gallimard.

- Frank, K. (2005). Exploring the Motivations and Fantasies of Strip Club Customers in Relation to Legal Regulations. *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 34 (5): 487–504.
- Gagnon, J. H. (1990). The explicit and implicit use of the scripting perspective in sex research. *Annual review of sex research*, 1(1): 1-43.
- Gagnon, J. H. and Simon, W. (1973). *Sexual conduct*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Huysamen, M. and Boonzaier, F. (2015) Men's Constructions of Masculinity and Male Sexuality through Talk of Buying Sex. *Culture, Health & Sexuality* , 17(5) : 541–54.
- Jackson, S. and Scott, S. (2010a). *Theorizing Heterosexuality*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Jackson, S., and Scott, S. (2010b). Rehabilitating Interactionism for a Feminist Sociology of Sexuality." *Sociology*, 44(5): 811–26.
- Joseph, L.J. and Black, P. (2012). Who's the Man? Fragile Masculinities, Consumer Masculinities, and the Profiles of Sex Work Clients. *Men and Masculinities*, 15(5): 486-506.
- Katsulis, Y. (2010). "Living Like a King": Conspicuous Consumption, Virtual Communities, and the Social Construction of Paid Sexual Encounters by U.S. Sex Tourists. *Men and Masculinities*, 13 (2): 210–30.
- Kessler, S.J., and McKenna, W. (1978). *Gender. An Ethnomethodological Approach*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kong T.S.K. (2015) Romancing the Boundary: Client Masculinities in the Chinese Sex Industry. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 17(7): 810–24.
- Kulick, D. (2005). Four Hundred Thousand Swedish Perverts. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 11(2): 205-235.
- Kim J.L., Sorsoli C.L., Collins K., Zylbergold B.A., Schooler D. and Tolman D.L. (2007). From Sex to Sexuality: Exposing the Heterosexual Script on Primetime Network Television, *The Journal of Sex Research*, 44(2): 145-157.
- Mahay, J., Laumann, E. O., and Michaels, S. (2001). Race, Gender, and Class in Sexual Scripts. In E. O. Laumann & R. T. Michael (Eds.), *Sex, Love, and Health in America. Private Choices and Public Policies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 197–238.
- Masters, N.T., Casey, E., Wells, E.A. and Morrison, D.M. (2013). Sexual Scripts among Young Heterosexually Active Men and Women: Continuity and Change. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 50(5): 409-420.
- Milrod, C. and Monto. M-A. (2012). The Hobbyist and the Girlfriend Experience: Behaviors and Preferences of Male Customers of Internet Sexual Service Providers. *Deviant Behavior*, 33 (10): 792–8.
- Milrod, C. and Weitzer, R. (2012). The Intimacy Prism: Emotion Management among the Clients of Escorts. *Men and Masculinities*, 15 (5): 447–67.

Peng, Y.-W. (2007). Buying Sex: Domination and Difference in the Discourses of Taiwanese Piao-Ke. *Men and Masculinities*, 9 (3): 315–36.

Sakaluk J.K., Todd L.M., Milhausen R., Lachowsky N.J. and Undergraduate Research Group in Sexuality (URGiS) (2014). Dominant Heterosexual Sexual Scripts in Emerging Adulthood: Conceptualization and Measurement. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 51(5): 516-531.

Sanders, T. (2008a). Male Sexual Scripts: Intimacy, Sexuality and Pleasure in the Purchase of Commercial Sex, *Sociology*, 42 (3): 400–417.

Sanders, T. (2008b). *Paying for Pleasure. Men who Buy Sex*. Collumpton: Willan Publishing.

Seal D.W. and Ehrhardt A.A. (2003). Masculinity and Urban Men: Perceived Scripts for Courtship, Romantic, and Sexual Interactions with Women. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 5(4): 295-319.

Simon, W. and Gagnon, J.H. (1986). Sexual Scripts: Permanence and Change. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 15(2): 97-120.

Weitzer, R. (2009). Sociology of Sex Work. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 35 (1): 213–34.

Wepener, I., Learmonth, D., McLeod, K. and Chikte, Z. (2013). Beyond the Tease: Exploring Men's Constructions of Paying for Sex in South Africa. *Psychology Research*, 3 (12): 749 - 761.

West C. and Zimmermann, D.H. (1987). Doing Gender. *Gender & Society*, 1: 125-51.

Williams, S., Lyons L. and Ford, M. (2008). It's about Bang for Your Buck, Bro: Singaporean Men's Online Conversations about Sex in Batam, Indonesia. *Asian Studies Review* 32 (1): 77–97.

Zelizer, V. (2005). *The Purchase of Intimacy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.