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Media Culture Society 2006; 28; 883

DOI: 10.1177/0163443706068922

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Race, gender and sex on the net: semantic networks of selling and storytelling sex tourism

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Debates about the impact of the internet on society oscillate between utopian and dystopian poles, usually in regards to issues of the digital divide and community building (Burnett and Marshall, 2003). Boosters of the internet predicted it to be a place where social inequalities would be democratized. Individuals and groups would find new spaces for expression and alternative methods of communication that could circumvent dominant forms of mainstream media, state-regulated telecommunications and the technological constraints of old media (Gates, 1996; Gilder, 1994; Rheingold, 1994). Proponents also argued that people could have more control over their own identities, free from the social structures of difference, such as race and gender. These types of debates about the internet often offered prognostications about the solid implications of this emerging technology. Current internet studies, however, have turned the focus of research to what is actually occurring online.

While the networks that preceded the internet were created by agents of state control (Abbate, 1999; Castells, 2001), the rapid diffusion of the internet in the 1990s has enabled marginalized groups to establish URLs and innovate their own forms of community such as e-zines (Cresser et al., 2001), Queer Sisters (Nip, 2004) and Afrofuturism (Eglash, 2002; Nelson, 2002). For instance, Cresser et al. (2001) found that women have been using e-zines to establish an alternative voice to mainstream media discourse and broadcast to a mass audience. Nip (2004) has shown how the Hong Kong-based Queer Sisters bulletin board fosters the building of relationships and community. Afrofuturism, a movement made up of a loose collection of artists, musicians, writers and critics, converges on issues of the Black Atlantic communities and technology in digital culture

Media, Culture & Society © 2006 SAGE Publications (London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi), Vol. 28(6): 883–905
[ISSN: 0163-4437 DOI: 10.1177/0163443706068922]

(Eglash, 2002; Nelson, 2002). The internet has also been utilized by right-wing groups to spread messages of white-power (Gabriel, 1998; Ware and Back, 2002).

Although previous studies have made important contributions and insights into dystopian and utopian aspects of the internet, they have given a limited view of identity formation through a focus on single dimensions of difference, such as gender, sexuality or race. Critical scholars have argued that race, gender and sexuality interact to reproduce or challenge structures of difference, often in contradictory ways (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992; Hall, 1996; Hill-Collins, 2000; Mohanty, 2003). This study investigates how discourses of race, gender, sexuality and the market intersect online in the construction of identity through an examination of semantic networks on websites and discussion boards for sex tourism. I argue that the selling of sex tourism and sex tourist storytelling are structured in a manner where neither race, sexuality and gender, nor the market overdetermines the character of the discourse. Foucault has shown how modern social power operates through a web of discourses. Identity formation is not based on a unitary identity but emanates through a number of strategic points of negotiation over the meaning of identification and difference. Using a quantitative approach to usually qualitative concerns, this study investigates Foucault's problematic empirically through a complementary combination of content analysis and network analysis. Content analysis reveals the major themes in the sex tourism semantic network, while the network analysis determines the organization of the themes and the structure of power. Does race, gender or sexuality determine the character of the discussion boards and websites? Or is the structure of the semantic network decentralized?

Sex tourism on the internet is at the confluence of issues of race, gender, sexuality, technology and globalization. Increasingly, information and communication technologies (ICTs), such as the internet, are playing a particularly significant role not only in the promotion and packaging of sex tourism but of a new type of global surveillance of bodies, race and desire (Gabriel, 1998, 2000; Ware and Back, 2002). Cyberspace enables sex tourists to build deeper connections between the racialization, sexualization and commodification of sex workers' bodies and Western masculinity. Like chat rooms (Travers, 2000), MUDs (Turkle, 1995) and MOOs (White, 2002), sex tourists use discussion boards to exchange information and give immediate feedback on their experiences. In this culture of hypertext, users are active contributors to the representation of sex tourism as the recombinant nature of the discussion boards allows them to be consumers and producers (Elmer, 2004: 56; Landow, 1992). The members of this community discuss issues and places with the intention of buying sex and from the experiences of that desire and pursuit. This raises important concerns regarding dystopian and utopian outcomes of internet use. Instead

of ICTs making us freer and more democratic, they may be deepening social inequality and structures of difference.

Globalization, mass tourism and sex tourism

The type of society emerging from globalization has been characterized as one based around flows of information and networks. The crucial pathways to sources of domination and change in globalization lie in having access to the network and its internal logics. In this new, global dynamic 'the power of flows takes precedence over the flows of power' (Castells, 1996: 467). Flows have a number of dimensions that Appadurai (1990) refers to as *scapes* of ethnicity, technology, finance, media and ideology. Analyses of the economic and political transformations of globalization tend to treat the various *scapes* as the result of a global pluralism, detached from social processes of gender, race, class and sexuality. While the power of flows may be the defining character of the network, Massey and others have insisted on accounting for the 'power geometry' of global flows, as different people and groups have uneven access and influence to the means of cultural and material production, as well being differentially impacted by them (Massey, 1993; Morely, 2000). Sex tourism on the internet is a strategic site for examining the continuities and discontinuities in the reorganization of power and identity through globalization. Sex tourism and the internet are at the confluence of global flows of information, technology, identity and the new economy.

Sex tourism is a niche market of the global tourism industry. Curiously, tourism itself has largely been omitted from the grand discussions in academia, industry and government about the changing nature and impact of globalization (Enloe, 1989). A set of interconnected industries from the macro level, such as the various airlines, to the meso level, such as local services (restaurants, bars, hotels, beachside rentals, etc.) and the micro, everyday practices of tourists and workers make up the Global Tourism Network (GTN). During the 1990s, academic and private sector observers of the international tourism industry placed it second only to the oil industry (Truong, 1990) and predicted that it would become the dominant global industry in the early 21st century (Apostolopoulos et al., 1996; Crick, 1996; Enloe, 1989; Urry, 1990; World Tourism Organization [WTO], 2000). In the mid 1980s, 200 million people were international tourists (Enloe, 1989: 20). By the end of 2001, this number had risen to 693 million travelers spending US \$463 billion worldwide (World Tourism Organization, 2003), rising again in 2002 to 702.6 million travelers spending US \$474.2 billion (World Tourism Organization, 2004). The year 2003 showed a slight drop in overall tourist arrivals; however, 2004 finished with a record high of 760 million (World Tourism Organization,

2005). Although it is difficult to track numbers of travelers and spending specifically on sex travel, commentators such as Kempadoo and Doezema (1998) suggest that it is probably a multibillion-dollar industry and an increasingly significant node in the GTN.

A key component of sex tourism is the movement of symbolic representations of a sexualized and racialized sex worker (Davidson and Taylor, 1999; Enloe, 1989; Mullings, 1999; Truong, 1990). While images of sex workers have primarily been disseminated through informal networks of mail-order travel guides, magazines and videotapes, the internet has become an increasingly important tool for the global diffusion of information. Since the mid 1990s, websites have popped up in the internet galaxy as key sites of commercial and information exchange in the development of the sex tourism industry.

Sex tourism websites combine and incorporate features of mainstream commercial sites such as Amazon, Expedia and eBay. The websites are product providers, experience oriented and user driven. They act as a virtual store window for the sex tourism industry while providing points of sale for potential travelers, frequent fliers or those who just want to do some window-shopping. Potential travelers looking for information for their next adventure abroad can find one-time purchase products such as travel literature, guidebooks, newsletters and magazines. For the frequent flier, subscription-based content includes online books, streamed videos, movies and picture galleries with prices ranging from US \$5.00 per week to yearly packages at US \$59.95. The package tours are all-inclusive and guaranteed for the traveler who likes to leave little risk in their vacation experience:

Thailand is known Worldwide as the 'Disneyland for adults'. On our Thailand tour you'll stay in a luxurious hotel setting complete with pool and top notch room service. Our experienced Thai guides will take care of your every need and be there for you 24 hours a day. They'll provide **STEP by STEP** instructions and guidance helping you maximize your Thailand tour of time and pleasure. Showing you the best Thailand sex clubs, restaurants, sightseeing and sex entertainment plus explaining the many Thai sex customs and cultures. (www.dexterhorn.com)

A common feature of sex tourism websites is a discussion or message board. Here, sex tourists can provide more detailed information on various aspects of sex travel. The more sophisticated forums are browsable and highly organized by general topic or by continent, with subgroups ranging through countries all the way down to city districts and specific bars. The users of the board do not deal in polite euphemisms about acts of sex, prostitutes and buying sex.

While the internet provides a marketplace for products and services, it also sells something else. At the denotative level are the products and services, the images of sex workers and information about where to go and

how to obtain sexual services. They share similar features as mainstream tourism companies such as Lonely Planet, Let's Go, Hotwire.com and Thomas Cook, offering general travel information and the promise of a risk-free travel experience and sun, surf and sand. The added-value offered by sex tourism websites, however, is in myth-making and (male) self-empowerment.

The internet and sex tourism websites are not only tools for information exchange and product distribution, but also structuring devices that create and reproduce myths of sex worker sexuality, race and male dominance. Sex tourism websites entice the consumer to engage in a specific type of travel. There exists a synergy between the sex industry and the travel industry. What distinguishes sex tourism websites is that they are not just selling products and services, places, people and (sexual) adventure, they are selling them through discourses of the marketplace, gender, race and sexuality.

Discursive formations, semantic networks and power

Male fantasies of the female Other are structured by sexualized and racialized discursive formations. Discursive formations are established hierarchical orders of 'truth' that organize language and determine communicative practices in a particular historical moment (Foucault, 1972; Hall, 1997). Put another way, the manner in which we talk and think about subjects or issues is limited to the choices of frames available to an actor in a given historical and social context. Discursive formations structure ways of thinking and storytelling that reinforce already taken-for-granted notions of identity and difference while limiting alternative constitutions (Lidchi, 1997: 191). Discourse does not merely reflect social practices, relations and structures. It plays a constitutive role in the construction and reproduction of them (Emirbayer and Goodwin, 1994; Wetherell and Potter, 1992). The way sex tourists employ racialized and sexualized discourse in talk about sex workers and sex travel is not simply a reflection of reality, but the language and codes they deploy also frame their experiences, both in the past and, potentially, in the future.

The discussion boards are not only networking people, but ideas and frameworks of understanding or semantic networks. Semantic networks are shared cultural meanings about a particular phenomena; they are meanings by association (Du Gay, 1997: 15). They connect the descriptive or literal meanings of a word or concept with broader connotations and cultural discourses or discursive formations. The stories about sex tourism in the discussion board and websites have their own networks of meaning about female sexuality, male dominance and the market. However, they are connected to broader cultural discourses about orientalism, gender and

globalization. From a micro point of view, they are part of a particular discussion string and, at the macro level, each contributes to an evolving discursive formation about sex tourism. The overall narratives that structure sex tourism stories are evolving in the sense that the mechanism of user feedback constantly pushes the discursive possibilities and actual boundaries of the board in terms of its size. The readers are also writers. None of the posts is a self-contained unit. This dynamic is similar to how Foucault viewed the borders of books as ambiguously demarcated.

. . . beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full stop, beyond its eternal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network. (1972: 23)

Likewise, discussion board posts contribute to a larger discussion while, at the same time, being constrained by the topic and the type of storytelling about that topic which is already under way. They are nodes within a broader semantic network, that is, within the broader collection of postings and within broader cultural formations.

Cultural formations are interrelated symbols that have a 'nonmaterial structure' and are organized in a manner similar to material structures while, analytically, being separate from them (Alexander and Smith, 1993). New structural sociology argues for bringing an analytical lens to bear on culture as an autonomous entity in society, calling for an internal analysis of cultural/discursive structures. While human agency has traditionally been dependent on material (meaning economic and network) structures, Emirbayer and Goodwin argue 'cultural formations are significant because they both constrain and enable historical actors, in much the same way as do network structures themselves' (1994: 1440). Actors are both enabled and constrained by cultural formations. They are enabled by 'ordering their understandings of the social world and of themselves, by constructing their identities, goals, and aspirations, and by rendering certain issues significant or salient and others not' (1994: 1441). In a recursive and relational manner, actors are constrained by a foreclosing of certain options or possibilities for action as well as having to rely on established frames. Of course, this is not news to cultural scholars. What is significant about this development from new structural sociology, though, is an acknowledgment of the autonomy of culture from inside the structural camp. Looking at culture through a quantitative analysis is an important convergence of structural and cultural approaches. In order to make this bridge, what is needed is a method to operationalize social power.

Throughout his work, Foucault theorizes a model of social and political power that contrasts traditional top-down configurations. Instead, he postulates that social power is arranged in a diffuse fashion and works through

strategic points in a web of discourses (1977: 26, 1978: 95–6, 1980: 98). While the points of power are diffused, this does not necessarily make for a more democratic formation. Domination can and does exist and persist. I would argue that Foucault's conceptualization of power can be understood and operationalized as a network theory. Taking the posts on the sex tourism discussion board as a whole, the themes across the different strings and sub-categories of organization can be conceptualized as nodes in a network, a semantic network of sex tourism. Following Foucault, the network will be a decentered network, where neither race, gender nor economic discourse dominates the relationship between the themes. Telling stories about sex tourism would not necessarily need to be about race, sex or money in every instance. However, the dominant tendencies of the stories would be articulated through the coordinates of racialized, gendered, sexualized and commercial discourses.

Method

This research examines 22 sex tourism websites (STW) and sex tourist discussions on message boards from two of the websites. The data consist of 22 homepages, 1143 discussion board postings from www.dexterhorn.com (DH) and 220 postings from www.worldsexguide.com (WSG) (consulted March and November 2003, respectively). The homepages are the portals to the site and use pictures, descriptions of site and content, and links to attract the traveler/web surfer to the site web pages. The boards are divided into the world's continents and a number of other discussion topics. The semantic network analysis is conducted by taking the output of a computer-assisted content analysis (CACA) and running the data through network analysis software. While quantitative content analysis has been well critiqued, it is a useful method for classifying large amounts of text into thematic categories that can reveal important discursive properties (Bruce, 2004; Krippendorff, 2003; Turner, 1997). This is especially useful in online research where datasets for discussion boards, emails, listserves and databases can contain particularly onerous amounts of information for sorting and coding. A CACA analyzes the units of observation (the posts and the homepages) in terms of identified themes and classifies the words into content categories. General Inquirer (GI), which includes the Harvard IV dictionary, can efficiently handle large amounts of text. Its strengths include over 100 vetted categories and disambiguated words and its high reliability among different speech occasions; it has been used to analyze a number of texts and it has greater content validity than human coders (Abrahamson and Fairchild, 1999: 718). Augmenting the GI dictionary was

necessary due to the colloquial nature of the language used on the websites and discussion boards. For example, the GI dictionary does not include words such as 'horny', 'topless' or 'blow job'. The coding protocol for this particular dataset included theory-driven themes (the higher-order concepts racialization, sexualization and commodification), but it also allowed for emergent themes.

Network analysis converts the output of the content analysis into a semantic network and measures its structure and the relationship between the themes or nodes. There are three matrices under analysis: the discussion boards from DH, the discussion board from WSG and the home-pages from STW. This study is interested in the structure of the matrix and the strength or position of the themes. The structure of the network refers to the relative position of the themes in relation to one another, or how they are connected. Foucault's theory of power suggests a decentralized network arrangement where at least two or more nodes are dominant, while a more traditional structure would be hierarchical and centralized with the nodes concentrated around one, dominant node. A highly centralized network indicates that a particular theme is discussed commonly and frequently across the discussion board. A decentralized network would show that the network is characterized by a number of predominant themes. The position of the themes determines which ones characterize the discourse in the semantic network. They are the themes that are most likely to be present in each of the individual posts and would be more likely to frame the discussions. In network analysis, the concept of centrality provides measures of structure and position.

Centrality measures are known as prestige or power measures in network analysis (Monge and Contractor, 2003). This measure determines, at the global level of the semantic network, the degree of centralization of the network and, at the nodal level, which themes hold the most prominent positions. Degree centrality shows the number of direct links a node has with other nodes in the network and indicates prominent positions (Wasserman and Faust, 1994: 172). It is a local measure that shows how well points are connected in their local environments (Scott, 2000: 84). Researchers have used degree centrality as an 'indicator of the node's social capital or centrality' (Monge and Contractor, 2003: 38). While the content analysis shows which themes characterize the discourse on websites, the network analysis shows its semantic structure. Foucault argues that discursive formations operate through a web of discourses where nodes, or themes, articulate in different instances. Centrality measures will show if one theme, a centralized network, or a number of them, a decentralized network, dominate the discussion. If this is the case, then the tendency when talking about and advertising sex tourism involves not solely race or gender, for example, but a combination of both.

Selling and storytelling sex tourism: the marketplace, masculinity, race and sexuality

The content analysis of the homepages and the discussion boards identified predominant themes found in the literature on sex tourism: the marketplace, gender, race and sexuality. Not surprisingly, these themes dominated the discussions of the users of the discussion boards and the marketing of the homepages. As one of the primary purposes of sex tourism on the web is the instrumental practice of information exchange, sex tourists share stories and experiences about where to go to buy sex, how much one should expect to pay and types of sexual services. Other predominant themes include safety, health, 'packed out' and greedy. The following sections offer a closer reading of the themes.

Health and safety

Concerns about safety are similar to those of mainstream tourists, from pickpockets to political unrest. Health refers to the hygienic conditions of travel destinations or disease. There is little reference to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), which is surprising considering the spread of AIDS worldwide. Opinions about 'catching something' range from downplaying risks to outright denial of risk.

Well, I guess eventually if you hang out long enough and bang enough girls, you're bound to come down with something. If so, you'll need to visit one of the local Clinics. They're easy to find. . . . Just look for the any of the Red Cross signs and you'll know you're there. Drop you're drawers and take a shot like a man.

Although this message offers advice for curing a disease, it suggests that the actual contracting of an STD is infrequent. The post also implies that sexual experiences are common and numerous.

'Packed out' and greedy

Simultaneous expressions of desire and deceit underwrite sex tourism discourse. Sex workers are portrayed as both objects of admiration and suspicion as they are to be acquired, but not trusted. This ambivalent characterization of the Other has its roots in colonial conquest and has been well articulated by postcolonial scholars (Bhabha, 1984; Parameswaran, 2002; Said, 1978). Modern Western travelers share a sense of the exotic with their historical counterparts. Sex tourists report to one another on the

discussion boards like colonial explorers sending word back home about an untouched and bountiful land of untold riches.

The place was reeking with so much pussy you could have stacked the girls on top of each other a mile high, and you'd have only just begun. . . . there are so many bars packed out with so many girls. Your head will be spinning from all of the available women. And believe me, they are available! This town is overflowing with women!

Unlike the 'empty' lands waiting to be penetrated by colonial conquest, 'women are the earth that is to be discovered, entered, named, inseminated and, above all, owned' (McClintock, 1995: 31). Sex tourists talk about the 'packed out' bars with excitement and anticipation. Always lurking in their boosterism, though, is a sense of *noir*. Along with fascination and desire, there exists a deep suspicion of sex workers. According to sex tourists, they are greedy, tricky and manipulative.

She can be found during noon time at the only internet café in town. Surfing the net for men and for her next victim. She has three men convinced that her most recent of three kids is theirs. At the same time she gets support from the three of them. . . . the weekly disco which draws the girls from the surrounding areas, there is always a few scammers among them.

What begins as a relationship of aid from the point of view of the tourist, 'You feel sorry for them, and you know they're poor. Because you have money, you feel strong' (interview in Seabrook, 1996: 30), becomes one of suspicion.

It is how many are transformed, in their own imagination, into victims: they, the conquerors, the invincible, wind up feeling they have been cheated, their 'innocence' taken advantage of, their good heartedness exploited. It is a strange reversal of reality. (Seabrook, 1996: 35; see also Davidson and Taylor, 1999: 43)

In order to 'regain' a position of dominance, sex tourists use money, masculinity, race and sex.

The marketplace for the sexual tourist

Considering the theme of the marketplace, a neoclassical economic approach would suggest that the sex tourist visits sex tourism websites because of the promise of a lower transaction cost for sexual services than could be found in their home, usually an economically developed nation. Here, the logic of a globalized market place in the new economy seeks cheaper sex and better quality in a location different from one's home country. Crick puts it more directly when he argues that tourists 'do not go

to these countries because the people are friendly, they go because a holiday there is cheap' (1996: 25). A sex tourist interviewed by British journalist Jeremy Seabrook echoes this rationale and remarks that 'I came because it was cheap. . . I use [Thai women] like I might use any other amenity, a restaurant or a public convenience' (1996: 33). Thus, the chief concerns of the sex tourist are low cost and high quality of services.

Re-masculinization

While the actual price of sexual services in many developing countries may indeed be cheaper than the going rate of a sex worker in the US, if the cost of traveling abroad (airfare, hotel, food, etc.) is factored in, the actual price would be much less at home. This points to added-value in the cost of sex tourism. The money sex tourists bring to countries like Cuba, Brazil, India and Thailand affords them something other than cheap sex. There is a performative aspect which makes them feel strong and powerful as the act of traveling for sex can be understood as 'a collective behavior oriented toward the restoration of the "generalized belief" of what it is to be male' (Davidson and Taylor, 1999: 39). This restoration can be viewed as a response to what Castells has called the 'crisis of patriarchy' that has been prompted by second-wave feminism (1997; see also Beynon 2002). Women's challenge to their structural and cultural status was perceived by many men to be an attack on male roles and masculinity in society.

Some argue that there has always been a crisis in masculinity; the 'crisis' is neither new nor unique (Beynon, 2002). However, the association of buying cheap sex for money is viewed by sex tourists as a form of male power. Whereas the meaning of such practices may have been more taken for granted in the past, interviews with sex tourists have revealed that they are actively seeking such practices of domination through economic sexual arrangements (Davidson and Taylor, 1999; Seabrook, 1996). Research has shown that sex tourists perceive a shift in the sex gender system in favor of women and seek to rectify a position of imagined subordination through the act of buying sex cheaply (see Kempadoo, 1999). The reality of a supposed inversion is quite the opposite. While women in the global south experience exploitation and discrimination, there are a number of groups, both at the local and global level, who advocate for sex worker's rights, such as SWEAT (Sex Worker Education and Advocacy Taskforce) in South Africa, COIN (Centro de Orientación e Investigación Integral) and MODEMU (Movimiento de Mujeres Unidas) in the Dominican Republic, La Unión Unica in Mexico and the international NGO Network of Sex Work Projects (NWSW) (Cabezas, 1998, 1999; Kempadoo, 1999; Kempadoo and Doezema, 1998). Individually though, sex tourists mistake any sign of agency on the part of sex workers, whether it be through the

advocacy of NGOs or simply in the negotiation over price and other terms of the deal, as an affront to the Western male's position of privilege and evidence that, in fact, men are the victims. In response to a crisis in patriarchy, a 're-masculinization' (Beynon, 2002: 90) emerged in the 1990s where Western men have attempted to 'reclaim' a position of power that is perceived to be waning with the successes of the second wave of feminism. This response considers the Western woman to have become too independent, too demanding on men and too in control of her own sexuality. A flash-driven advertisement on Bangkok Knight's Global Village website asks:

Know what the difference between sex for money and sex for free is?

Sex for money is a LOT cheaper!

Are you an adventurous, single male?

Recently been FUCKED over in a divorce perhaps?

Or maybe just looking for a good time with women who aren't feminist, Men-hating BITCHES!

Join us on BGV and we'll show you where to have the time of your life!

Learn all you'll need to know to enjoy a vacation or start a new life among beautiful, young, nubile, NON-complaining women! Women whose soul [sic] desire is to please YOU and not THEMSELVES!

The marketing of sex workers, especially Asian woman, is situated in a binary position to the perceived identity of the American woman: dependent/independent, submissive/domineering, sexually available/sexually liberated and domestically inclined/career oriented. A sex tourist interviewed in Bangkok sums up these sentiments:

American women are fucking bitches. You don't want to deal with American women – these women are the best, their minds have the right attitude. There's no girl in the world (other than in Bangkok) that will give you a shower, give you a blow job, fuck your brains out, and fold your clothes with a smile on her face. (O'Rourke, 1991)

The added-value of sex tourism in the exchange of money for sex is the guarantee of submissiveness, traditional gender roles and the 'right' attitude. Beynon argues that the process of re-masculinization has been a national project in response to 'un-masculinizing' historical events, such as men returning from the Second World War in Great Britain, or the election of Ronald Reagan as a response to the hippy 1960s and the 'soft' leadership of Jimmy Carter (2002: 90). Sex tourism becomes a trans-national project where the pursuit of unbridled sexuality over women is intended to reassert men's 'proper' place in the social order.

Racialization

Customers of prostitution have often sought out 'sex workers whose racial, national, or class identities [were] different from their own' (Shrage, 1994: 142). The demands by white Western men for prostitutes from Latin America, Africa and Asia may be 'explained in part by culturally produced racial fantasies regarding the sexuality of these women' (Davidson and Taylor, 1999: 48). Alastair, a middle-aged Australian traveling in Thailand, comments that the 'women have a skill ours don't have; and that is what you are paying for' (Seabrook, 1996: 43). An integral part of the fantasy is the perception that Asian women's sensuality and sexual ability are more 'natural' than that of Western women.

Western sex tourists . . . say that prostitution is not really prostitution but a 'way of life,' that 'They' are 'at it' all the time. . . . The supposed naturalness of prostitution in the Third World actually reassures the Western male sex tourist of his racial or cultural superiority. Thus we find that sex tourists continue a traditional Western discourse of travel which rests on the imagined opposition between the 'civilized' West and the 'barbarous' Other. (Davidson and Taylor, 1999: 43)

Bob, a middle-aged tourist from New Zealand, echoes Manderson: 'I think they're sensual, very skilled, very attractive. They know how to make love by instinct' (Seabrook, 1996: 21). While the sexuality of sex workers is perceived as natural and normal, the tourists seek sexual experiences that are quite the contrary.

Transgressive sexuality

The racialized sexuality of sex workers provides a site for sex tourists to have experiences that they normally would not be able to have at home. Since they are of a different 'race'/culture, the 'exotic' women of the East are to be experienced and, as Enloe explains, 'the male tourist feels he has entered a region where he can shed civilization's constraints, where he is freed from standards of behavior imposed by respectable women back home' (1989: 28). A typical example is someone like Vince, who once worked as a sales representative for an armaments manufacturing company from Britain, who told Seabrook, 'I never would have caught fire [at home] like I did [in Thailand]. I was not myself. . . . I was out of my social environment, and everything was more real' (1996: 35). Edward Said explains that this realness is actually the construction of myth, however: it is a projection onto Asian women as 'creature[s] of male power fantasy', where they 'express unlimited sensuality, they are more or less stupid, and above all willing' (1978: 207). While re-masculinization has 'caused' Western men to seek empowerment elsewhere, to some extent, sex tourism

acts as a time machine for male self-esteem and sexual practices free from cultural attitudes of what is decent sexual behavior. The Other remains a place where taboo sex can be obtained from 'superfeminine, submissive, mysterious, desirable, and docile' women, where 'sexual intercourse [is] cut loose from the ties of conventional, heterosexual monogamy' (Manderson and Jolly, 1997: 125), and the white, male traveler can find his true self.

The content analysis revealed the prevalent themes on the discussion boards and advertising on the homepages. A close reading of the themes illustrated how they are linked to colonial discourses and current discussions of tourism and masculinity. In the next section, the network analysis will show the relationship of the themes to one another and the structure of the semantic network.

Network analysis of storytelling and selling sex tourism

Network analysis was conducted on two iterations of DH, WSG and STW. The first iteration (DH_a, WSG_a and STW_a) included the raw themes, many of which indicated the higher-order concepts (race, gender, sexuality, the market) discussed in the previous section. Where appropriate, the indicator concepts were collapsed into the higher-order concepts, producing a second set of matrices (DH_b, WSG_b and STW_b). Normalized centrality measures were conducted only on the first set to find the relative positions of the themes within the network and to find the degree of centralization or decentralization. Confirming Foucault's theory, DH_a, WSG_a, and STW_a proved to be highly decentralized network with equivalent scores among a number of the themes (see Table 1).

While the normalized centrality measures show the network at the global level with a number of themes having equivalent positions, it explains little about the relationship between the individual themes. The Freeman degree measure (Table 2) shows a slightly different structure within the network. The same themes hold the higher and lower positions as in Table 1; however, the shared tiers in the normalized scores do not hold. Table 2 shows a ranking of the themes.

Naming sex workers, sex acts, price and racialization shared the highest measurements across the matrices. Two messages show how the articulation of the themes changes in different discursive occasions:

They all come in different sizes, shapes, and colors. Prices range from 50 dollars to 100 dollars. It is up to you to pick the right girl or girls for a good time – I suggest you go for the beautiful ones with a kind and gentle personality who are interested in having pleasing sex with you, and not just in getting your dollars.

TABLE 1
Normalized centrality measures for DHa, WSGa and STWa

<i>DH</i>		<i>WSG</i>		<i>STW</i>	
Theme	Degree	Theme	Degree	Theme	Degree
Sex act	100	Sex act	94	Sex act	94
Naming SW*	100	Naming SW	94	Naming SW	94
SW personality	100	SW personality	94	SW personality	94
Quality of service	100	SW body	94	SW body	94
Price	100	Quality of service	94	Quality of service	94
Places to buy sex	100	Price	94	Naming ST	94
Racial	100	Places to buy sex	94	Post with picture	94
SW body	94	Racial	94	Packed out	94
Naming ST*	94	Safety	94	Price	94
Packed out	94	Naming ST	88	Places to buy sex	94
Hygiene	94	Packed out	88	Racial	94
Safety	94	Hygiene	88	Safety	94
Health	94	Greedy	88	Greedy	94
Post with picture	89	Health	88	Hygiene	88
Greedy	89	Post with picture	56	Health	88
Currency	64	Currency	10	Currency	0

* Naming Sex Workers, Naming Sex Tourists

The racial referent of 'color' promises a buffet of different, non-white skin tones, while the gendered stereotype of the submissiveness of the female Other promises sexual temptation. The next quote makes a direct connection to purchasing a car and appeals to the racial discourse of sameness:

Just like Ford said about the Model 'T'. We have any color you want as long as it is black. I don't worry about color. Some of the best lays I've ever had were dark-skinned girls. They're all pink on the inside anyway.

DHa and WSGa are almost identical to one another throughout while sharing the top two positions. In fact, the bottom half and top half of each network have the same themes, with identical positions in some cases. However, the position of racial is a significant difference between the discussion boards and the homepages. Sex tourism websites make more explicit references to race in advertising their services.

Semantic networks DHb, WSGb and STWb contained only the higher-order concepts. Freeman scores for the 'b' networks show that all three networks share quite similar theme positions in Table 3. Naming sex workers and sex acts hold the most prominent positions in all three networks, with price dropping only one position in STWb, by a very small margin. The mid-range positions are quite similar, as are the lower positions. Two significant differences in the results are that pictures with posts and racial hold much higher positions in STWb than in DHb and

TABLE 2
Freeman degree centrality measures for DHa, WSGa, STWa

DH			WSG			STW		
Rank	Theme	Degree	Rank	Theme	Degree	Rank	Theme	Degree
1	Naming SW	532	1	Naming SW	152	1	Naming SW	137
2	Sex act	348	2	Sex act	137	2	Sex act	102
3	Price	315	3	Price	95	3	Racial	94
4	Quality of service	229	4	Places to buy sex	83	4	Price	93
5	Places to buy sex	223	5	Quality of service	60	5	Post with picture	93
6	Racial	208	6	SW body	50	6	Places to buy sex	79
7	SW body	162	7	SW personality	45	7	Quality of service	46
8	SW personality	155	8	Racial	32	8	SW body	37
9	Packed out	66	9	Safety	13	9	SW personality	26
10	Hygiene	66	10	Health	12	10	Safety	23
11	Safety	54	11	Hygiene	9	11	Packed out	19
12	Health	48	12	Naming ST	9	12	Naming ST	12
13	Naming ST	33	13	Packed out	7	13	Hygiene	8
14	Greedy	10	14	Greedy	4	14	Health	5
15	Post with picture	3	15	Post with picture	1	15	Greedy	3
16	Currency	2	16	Currency	1	16	Currency	0

TABLE 3
Freeman degree centrality measures for DHb, WSGb, and STWb

<i>DHb</i>			<i>WSGb</i>			<i>STWb</i>		
Rank	Theme	Degree	Rank	Theme	Degree	Rank	Theme	Degree
1	Commodification	579	1	Commodification	186	1	Sexualization	177
2	Naming SW	531	2	Sexualization	168	2	Commodification	150
3	Sexualization	520	3	Places to buy sex	152	3	Naming SW	137
4	Places to buy sex	223	4	Safety	83	4	Racial	94
5	Racial	208	5	Naming SW	32	5	Places to buy sex	79
6	Health	110	6	Naming ST	20	6	Safety	23
7	Packed out	66	7	Packed out	13	7	Packed out	19
8	Safety	54	8	Racial	8	8	Health	13
9	Naming ST	33	9	Health	7	9	Naming ST	12
10	Greedy	10	10	Greedy	4	10	Greedy	3

WSGb. A comparison of Freeman measures for DHb, WSGb and STWb shows that commodification and sexualization hold the higher positions across the networks. In fact, the structures of the top cohort and bottom cohort of DHb and STWb include the same themes.

Conclusion

The results of the comparison of themes in the sex tourism websites show that discourses of the market, gender, race and transgression structure the ways that sex tourism is sold and talked about. The products and services offered on the sites are packaged in a manner that entices the sex tourists to take a cheap journey into the past where masses of women of color play traditional roles as available and willing servants. The most important discourse is an economic one, as it characterized the websites the most times, followed closely by race and sexuality.

Turning to the discursive formations in the discussion boards, the results show that the structures of the discussion networks are highly decentralized. This is consistent with Foucault's theorizing of social power as a web of discourses. According to the normalized centrality scores, there are a number of themes that hold the more central positions and characterize the discussions, particularly references to sex, sex worker attitudes, quality of service, price and race. When considering the Freeman degree measures, a more complex picture of the networks emerges. When sex tourism is being marketed and talked about, the discourse is primarily about sex workers, types of sexual services, and quality and cost of buying sex. These discussions are deeply connected to place: knowing which countries to go to for a vacation and where to go for sexual encounters.

Critical race scholars have argued that, in order to properly understand how social power operates, interrogations of the intersections of structures of dominance, such as gender, race and sex, are important starting points. If the DHb and WSGb networks are conceptualized as examples of discursive formations of sex tourism, then one theme does not characterize the network, nor is one most central. Race or gender does not over-determine the identity of the network. Rather, there are a number of prominent themes that intersect or are closely and widely linked to make up the formation or network. This is an expression of the type of power that Foucault is referring to when he describes modern power operating in network form. The representations of sex workers are formed through the intersection of sexualized, commodified and racialized formations. One reason for the moderate position of the latter theme is that, especially in the case of discussions about Thailand and the Philippines, the largest number of postings, racial identification is largely assumed, as the populations are perceived to be homogeneous by sex travelers.

Discourses of exotic sex, race and commodification constitute the body of the sex worker and the practice of sex tourism. They operate in a manner that limits what can be said, not only about women in the sex trade but all women in developing nations. This is a widespread pattern throughout the discussion boards and websites, as illustrated through the combination of methods. The discourses in the discussion boards are consistent with the themes in the sex tourism websites. The myth-making in the sex tourism websites is intimately related to the practices of sex tourists. The production of discourses of cost and quality, sexual services, female servility and male domination resonate in the consumption of the sex tourists and reproduction of such discourses in the discussion boards. A significant difference is that the marketing of sex tourism through racialized codes on the websites is a much more overt practice. The selling and talk of sex tourism and the sex worker are through the articulation of race, sex and commodity.

The positions of two themes in the Freeman degree scores of DHb, WSGb and STWb point to further theoretical development and empirical investigation. SWNames and STNames code for mentions in the discussion posts of the sex workers and the sex travelers. Table 3 shows that the naming of the former is a very common practice; however, there is little mention of the men who travel for sex and write the posts. Scholars of whiteness have observed that one of the central practices of whiteness is the direction of the gaze. The Other is always in full view, being examined and objectified, but the source of the gaze is seldom revealed (Ashcraft and Allen, 2003; Delgado and Stefanic, 1997; Nakayama and Martin, 1999). The results suggest that the discussion boards and other forms of new media may be new horizons where we can examine practices of whiteness where the new media are being formed.

The Information age is changing the relationship between time, space, and form in racist culture. New territories of whiteness exceed the boundaries of the nation-state, while supplanting ethnocentric racisms with new translocal forms of narcissism and xenophobia. . . . the rhetoric of whiteness becomes the means to combine profoundly local grammars of racial exclusion within a translocal and international reach, which is made viable through digital technology. (Ware and Back, 2002: 3, 98)

Studies of whiteness and the internet are in their early stages and require much more in-depth analysis of the role of information communication technologies in the globalizing process.

This study has examined the ways in which race and gender find new expression through the internet in the employment of the sex tourism industry. The production of knowledge and the economy of products and services in sex tourism websites, and the consumption of sex tourists, have been shown to be sites where racialization and sexualization of sex workers intersect with discourses of the new global economy. Contrary to utopian

assertions that the internet will be a new virtual space for social progress, groups such as sex tourists are appropriating the technology in a dystopian manner. The internet does much more than provide another conduit for delivering materials (such as newsletters or videotapes) previously circulated via traditional mail. It marks an intensification and deepening of the development of sex tourism. Because of innovations in computing and networking, the information contained in the websites is cheaper to produce and of higher quality than previous print and analog materials. Digital information, including jpegs and mpegs, can be disseminated much more rapidly and diffused globally. Further, the user-driven message boards disrupt the producer–consumer transmission model of mail-order. Sex tourists are actively involved in a collaborative, real-time mapping of sex tourism routes – often from internet cafes in travel destinations – and the representation of sex workers. Gabriel asks whether new media technologies ‘enhance democratic processes, including greater accountability and scope for resistance, or do they merely provide the means for greater surveillance, this time on a global scale?’ (1998: 12). The results of this study provide a cautious example of the role of the internet in a global age.

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