

I Z A B E L A
Ś L Ę Z A K



SOCIAL
CONSTRUCTION OF
SEX WORK
ETHNOGRAPHY
OF ESCORT AGENCIES
IN POLAND

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 **JAGIELLONIAN**
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Łódź–Kraków 2019

Izabela Ślęzak, University of Łódź, Faculty of Economics and Sociology
Department of Sociology of Organization and Management
90-214 Łódź, Rewolucji 1905 r. Street no. 41/43
e-mail: iza.slezak@gmail.com

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Published by Łódź University Press & Jagiellonian University Press

First edition, Łódź–Kraków 2019

ISBN 978-83-8142-096-9 – paperback Łódź University Press

ISBN 978-83-233-4419-3 – paperback Jagiellonian University Press

ISBN 978-83-8142-097-6 – electronic version Łódź University Press

ISBN 978-83-233-9789-2 – electronic version Jagiellonian University Press

<https://doi.org/10.18778/8142-096-9>

Łódź University Press
8 Lindleya St., 90-131 Łódź
www.wydawnictwo.uni.lodz.pl
e-mail: ksiegarnia@uni.lodz.pl
phone +48 (42) 665 58 63



Distribution outside Poland

Jagiellonian University Press
9/2 Michałowskiego St., 31-126 Kraków
phone +48 (12) 631 01 97, +48 (12) 663 23 81, fax +48 (12) 663 23 83
cell phone: +48 506 006 674, e-mail: sprzedaz@wuj.pl
Bank: PEKAO SA, IBAN PL 80 1240 4722 1111 0000 4856 3325
www.wuj.pl



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PREFACE

This book is the result of a research project that I performed between 2007 and 2013, mostly within the area of the city of Lodz, one of the largest cities in Poland. Its purpose was to reconstruct the social organization of sex work in escort agencies.

Escort agencies have been operating in Poland for a little over 20 years in their present form. They are a “novelty” brought to Poland after the systemic and economic transformation.¹ These venues settled despite the abolitionist provisions of Polish law, which penalize third parties who encourage, organize or derive benefits from prostitution. They have become a part of the landscape of the largest cities, and also of some smaller towns, over time. Although the available statistical data are incomplete, there is no doubt that the agencies employ many women who combine sex work with other paid jobs or who treat it as their only source of income. My purpose, as a researcher, was to become familiar with the work experiences of the women in the agencies, and their everyday routine interactions with coworkers, *bosses*, and clients. I wanted to understand how an escort agency works, as a place for the provision of sex services, where a female worker meets a client according to the principles and rules determined by *the boss* of the venue. Therefore, my analysis of the complex phenomenon of indoor sex work focused on the organizational aspect, on ways the organization – which intends to offer commercial sex services – is created and recreated. Hence, the foreground is occupied by the perspective of the sociology of work and organization. At the same time, I reject the perspective of the sociology of morality, although this aspect of the phenomenon I researched is undoubtedly also interesting and important, not only in cognitive terms.

The choice of the analytical perspective that I adopted in the research was dictated to a great extent by the experiences I had meeting the women who provide sex services in the agencies. They referred to their activity as a job during the interviews and free conversations we had. Adopting this perspective and treating it as something more than just an attempt to rationalize their occupation validates the way in which they perceive their life and choices. Furthermore, it allows them to embrace the phenomenon of indoor sex work within a framework that pro-

¹ The process of systemic transformation began in Poland in 1989. The process of transforming from a socialist into a democratic system was started in a peaceful manner, thanks to the understanding made at the Round Table between representatives of the authorities and the leaders of underground “Solidarity” movement. These changes were also accompanied by economic (the development of a free market based on private ownership), social and moral transformations.

vides new possibilities for interpretation and theorization. It seems that researchers usually focus on the moment when involvement in sex work begins, and on the motives/conditions of this step or threats related to sex work. My purpose was to analyze the everyday life in an agency as this is the place where some female workers who are just beginning become socialized, and practices regarding health and safety are formed. The processes that take place on an ongoing basis in the group of coworkers and during meetings with clients also create a context for decision-making as regards staying in or leaving the work. Therefore, I believe that dynamics of the agency's everyday life is a crucially significant and undervalued aspect of involvement in indoor sex work.

The purpose of the research was to analyze the social construction of sex work in escort agencies. The phenomenon that I wanted to draw special attention to was the interactional work (cf. Strauss et al. 1985) between the female workers and the clients of the agency, but also between the other categories of the venues' workers, i.e., the female coworkers who provide sex services, the security workers, bartenders, and managers of the agencies. I was interested in both the course of the interactional work, its phases and categories, as well as its significance for the course of other processes (e.g., the socialization of new female workers, the development of safe working conditions). I also planned to research the organizational context in which sex services are provided and its meaning for the *work situation*.²

The adoption of this perspective was related to specific theoretical and methodological choices. The focus on the interactions that take place on the micro-scale of an organization made me utilize, first of all, theoretical concepts related to symbolic interactionism. This was also related to the methodological choices that I made. I found it highly significant from the stage of designing the research to familiarize myself with the perspective of the people involved in the world of escort agencies. What is more, I planned to present it in a report summarizing the project to the broadest extent possible. The majority of people in society perceive "prostitutes" and "pimps" as some vague stereotypical figures who, because of their marginal position, have no right to take part in the public discourse about them. Therefore, these people seldom have a chance to speak up about their experiences, or their statements appear only in some sensational media framework. The primary data collection techniques that I employed to create a space for the respondents to openly communicate and present their perspective included observations performed in escort agencies and interviews with their workers and clients. Thanks to the consent obtained from the managers of four escort agencies in Lodz, I was able to perform some ethnographic research there. The workers of the research agencies became my interviewees during unstructured interviews.

² Categories resulting from the analysis of the collected empirical data are written in italics.

The employed techniques allowed me to have direct contact with the people I was researching and observe interactional episodes in their “natural” surroundings. Thanks to my extended stay in the field, I was able to observe the changes that took place in both the researched agencies and my interviewees. This approach also resulted in providing the book with numerous quotes from the interviews, which are presented unchanged in linguistic terms. I believe that this will allow the reader to better understand the specificity of this social world and the described experiences.

The subsequent research and analytical steps undertaken in the project resulted from the ethnographic character of the research and the procedures of grounded theory methodology (Strauss, Corbin 1990; Konecki 2000; Gorzko 2008; Glaser, Strauss 1967). The logic of choosing the interviewees was determined by theoretical sampling (Gorzko 2008: 107–130; Glaser, Strauss 1967: 45–78). I analyzed the empirical data in accordance with the guidelines stipulated by Barney Glaser and Anselm Straus in *Discovery of Grounded Theory: strategies for qualitative research* (1967) and Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin in *Basics of Qualitative Research* (1990). Adopting grounded theory methodology allowed me to order the course of both the research and the analytical processes. It introduced tools which allow me to focus more deeply on data analysis in the flexible model of ethnographic research. The terms, categories, and hypotheses generated in the course of the analysis form a conceptual grid which can also be helpful for other researchers who have to deal with different kinds of sex work.

Therefore, this book is an ethnography of organizations that offer sex services, where special attention is given to the women who work there. Regarding the adopted perspective, the book has its limits. First of all, it is rooted in an analysis of how agencies in Poland are run. While taking into consideration the differentiation of the world of indoor sex work for readers from other countries, it may be a point of comparison rather than a source of knowledge about how the local market of sex services is run in their country. It is worth emphasizing that during my research I spoke to women who had chosen sex work on their own and who had not been forced to select such a path. The analysis presented in the book also pertains to such a situation. The experiences of women who were victims of human trafficking or who were brought to agencies in other ways, against their will, are not the main area of deliberations (although they are still somehow connected with the chapters describing the oppressive management style and the safety of sex work). The book is a result of ethnographic research. Hence, it focuses on the perspective of the micro-world of agencies and the interactions that take place there. Deliberations on some macro-social conditions of sex work are more a contextual element of the described phenomena. Although they exert a significant impact on how the agencies are run, they are the subject of numerous publications from other authors; thus, they are just a side thread in this book.

When starting the research, and later while writing down the conclusions, I intended to present the perspective of my interviewees, their perceptions of their own actions in escort agencies, in the broadest possible manner. My aim was not to “raise” the image of prostitution or to praise this phenomenon as a trouble-free way to earn money. Furthermore, I did not intend to stigmatize or moralize about what happens inside those agencies. Therefore, while presenting the results from the analysis, I neither defend nor criticize the axionormative order shared by Polish society. I treat the existence of prostitution in its indoor form as a social phenomenon that a sociologist (or a someone from another discipline) can and should consider scientifically, trying to minimize the influence of their own feelings or beliefs (especially those not directly realized or expressed). It is important especially when we research groups that are situated (both by others and by ourselves) on the margins of society, whose members are often stigmatized. In such cases, a researcher should treat the social stigma that they face as an element of the researched reality rather than contributing to its preservation by way of designing and performing the research or presenting the conclusions. The qualitative research is based on long-standing direct contact with the interviewees, which allows us to see those who are labeled as “deviants”, “fallen women” or “members of criminal community” as social actors entangled in various relationships that go beyond simple evaluations and diagnoses.

The book is composed of six chapters and the Annex.

The first chapter presents the research project that was the basis for the book. This is where I explain some of the methodological and theoretical choices that I made when planning and carrying out the research. I present the most important approaches that determine contemporary discourse about prostitution/sex work. I also demonstrate the theoretical framework that I adopted in the research project that I carried out. Later, I present the characteristics of the collected data which the conclusions are based on. I also draw attention to some practical and ethical dilemmas that appeared while carrying out the project. Moreover, I outline the specificity of the Polish indoor sex work sector and the legal context for the running of escort agencies.

The subsequent chapters present the results of the research and analyses of the collected data.

The second chapter is devoted to the category of *constructing the work situation*, which I examine in the context of relationships between the women who provide sex services in escort agencies and the managers of such venues. It demonstrates both the principles of work organization in the agencies as well as the process of recruiting female workers to a given venue. This is also where I present four different management styles of venues and the strategies adopted by the female workers as a response to the actions undertaken by *the bosses*.

In the third chapter, I focus on the relationships between the female workers of the escort agencies, which are permanently centered around rivalry and cooperation. I pay a lot of attention to the process of developing relationships in a workgroup, and to anticipatory socialization, which is crucial for continued involvement in agency work.

In turn, the fourth chapter is devoted to the interactions between the female workers and their clients that take place *in the lounge*. I present two strategies for choosing clients, *selective* and *non-selective*, as well as the reasons why a female worker may opt for one over the other. I discuss the technique of *strategic seduction* in detail, performed both individually and by teams of female workers, as well as *incidents* that lead to the break-down of an interaction.

The fifth chapter is where I discuss the notion of interactional work performed by the female workers *in the room*. It includes some work related to negotiating the range of services, the duration of the meeting, the prices, and the character of the relationships between a female worker and her client. I also present four scenarios for meetings with a client in the room, their characteristics, and the conditions that would provoke these situations.

The sixth chapter, related to work regarding the safety of an agency, covers characteristics of the actions undertaken by the managers of venues, the security workers, and the female sex workers themselves. Furthermore, I also discuss some strategies that the female workers adopt in reaction to the subjectifying behavior of clients.

This book is a revised version of the Polish edition *Praca kobiet świadczących usługi seksualne w agencjach towarzyskich*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2016, which received several awards, among others, the 2017 EGOS Book Award from the *European Group for Organizational Studies (EGOS)* for the best book in the field of organization studies, and the Annual Award of the *Section of Social Anthropology, Polish Sociological Association for the Best Research in Anthropology of the Year 2016*.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It would have been impossible to write this book without the help from numerous women and men involved in indoor sex work. They shared their experiences and knowledge with me for the seven years of this project's duration. I think, first of all, about the women who provide sex services, who agreed to the interviews and who provided me with a lot of spontaneous information during my observations. I would like to thank them so much for their open attitude, the trust they put in me, and the hospitality with which they welcomed me in the agencies. I would also like to thank the agencies' managers who, despite their worries,

agreed to my presence in the venues and provided me with good conditions for the research work (mainly by not interfering). I would like to thank the people who were my guardians and who introduced me to the world of agencies. My presence in the venues would probably have been impossible (in this scope) without their mediation with managers at the initial stage of the research. I would also like to thank my colleagues from the Institute of Sociology, for creating an atmosphere that contributed to my carrying out this project. I would finally like to express my special gratitude to my husband – Jakub – who supported me at all stages of the project and who was the first reader of the manuscript. Thank you for your understanding and support.

Chapter 1

RESEARCH PROJECT – ASSUMPTIONS, METHODS, CONTEXTS

1.1. CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH – INDOOR SEX WORK IN CONTEMPORARY POLAND

1.1.1. Escort agencies in Poland¹

Escort agencies, as a specific form of providing sex services, appeared in Poland in the first half of the 1990s. That was a time when sudden activity on the market of sex services could be observed (when it comes to both supply and demand). It was a result of the transformations that took place in Poland after 1989 in all spheres of life. In the beginning, it was mainly the forms of prostitution known from the Polish People's Republic² that developed, such as street and hotel room prostitution. However, the liberalization of the law (e.g. the freedom of establishing commercial law companies and registering own business enterprises, gaps in the law, insufficient actions undertaken by offices designated to control economic entities, and the relaxation of police supervision) encouraged various types of "investors." Seeing the opportunity for high profits, they tried to adapt patterns of sex business organization known from Western Europe to the local context. As a result, massage studios, escort agencies, model agencies, etc. started to appear in the urban space. They were often only a facade for actually operating brothels. They were frequently controlled by criminal groups; thus, the safety level of the female workers and clients was rather low. However, according to the individuals who ran or worked in such places during those times, they were very popular. The reason was that they were a novelty for the clients, who had seen such places in movies or heard about them in stories told by individuals who had traveled around Europe. Now, they were accessible to almost everyone, all the more that the rapidly increasing inflation encouraged people to spend the money

¹ The subchapter is based on data that I gathered as a part of a research project that is characterized in more detail in a later part of the chapter.

² According to the ideology, prostitution was meant to disappear on its own in socialism, along with the removal of the economic exploitation of the proletariat (Karpiński 1997: 166). But it did not happen, and prostitution kept developing intensively in subsequent years (especially in the 1960s and 1970s) in both the outdoor and indoor sectors.

quickly, including on such forms of entertainment. Hence, my interviewees often remembered the 1990s as a “golden age” of prostitution in Poland.

The increased demand for (indoor and outdoor) services was also accompanied by an increased supply of female sex work. One of the reasons was provided by the structural conditions: rapidly growing unemployment,³ women’s education which was inadequate for the new labor market, and the general feeling of loss in the realities of the neoliberal capitalism (Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, Grotowska-Leder 1996). Many women thought that work in the sex services sector was a very interesting temporary solution to their financial problems.

In the first years of 21st century, the market of places offering sex services underwent professionalization and differentiation. Increasingly more effective police actions meant that some of the clubs related to criminal groups ceased to exist. The places owned by individuals who did not invest in infrastructure and personnel lost their clients and closed as a consequence. New ones emerged as a replacement, meeting the expectations of increasingly more demanding clients to a greater extent, offering varied working conditions for the women who provide sex services there.

Currently, sex work in Poland is most intensively developed in the indoor sector while the scale of outdoor prostitution is systematically decreasing. An increasing proportion of the sex services market is occupied by people (of all sexes) who provide sex services in rented apartments, and working for themselves. The popularization of the Internet and its use at the stage of winning customers and performing sex services (cybersex) was crucial for this transformation.

The dominant form of indoor sex work in the research city, but also in the region, is provided by so-called *apartments*, which can be compared to cathouses from the 19th century. They are organized in private flats whose owners or renters welcome the customers, providing them with sex services. They are usually located within housing estates, developments with large blocks of flats, near their potential customers. However, they can be hard to find by those who are not very aware, as there are no visible banners or ads. Men find the women through recommendations from other clients or advertisements published in the press or on the Internet. *The apartments* operated most of all during the day, in order not to disturb the peace (thus causing conflicts) with the other residents of the block of flats. They are usually not a registered form of business enterprises, and they change their location very often. Hence, they are often not tailored to the specific requirements of the sex business. Despite their unique function, they look like “ordinary” flats, with particular rooms used for accepting clients. A kitchen or one of the bedrooms plays the function of a staff room. The same bathroom is used

³ Unemployment was especially tough for the female residents of Lodz, where the textile industry, which previously had constituted a pillar of the local labor market, was in decline.

by both the clients and the female workers. These flats usually do not have any additional attractions (a bar, a pole for dancing). It is also harder here to maintain standards related to gathering, storage, washing and drying of bed linen and towels. Because of the small number of rooms, usually, only a few women work in *the apartment*. Prices for meetings are lower than in agencies, and the scope of the offered services included in the basic prices is usually more comprehensive.

There are some unprofessional venues that can be stressed within the group of *apartments*. They are organized by the women who work there or one of them who does not provide sex services on her own but who hires other female workers for that purpose. There are also semi-professional or professional *apartments*. These types of venues (sometimes creating a chain) are planned as a cozier competition for escort agencies. They differ from “regular” *apartments*, with higher standards and prices.

There are also escort agencies within the sex service market (Wojciechowska 2012). They are a kind of brothel, providing their visitors with the possibility of using sexual services on the premises, at the client’s place, or in a hotel. Such places were established initially only in agglomerations, tourist cities and resorts in the first half of the 1990s, however, over the course of time, they also began to appear in smaller towns. This was related not only to the development of the market and the demand for such services, but also with the police forces’ actions at the beginning of the 21st century, which resulted in eliminating the largest organized crime groups. This led to an increase in security of such venues, which resulted in the emergence of many small agencies in blocks of flats and tenement houses.

The differences between agencies and *apartments* can be described with words uttered by the owner of one of the escort agencies, who said that “this can be compared to a factory that manufactures jumpers on a production line and a grandma who knits them [W1].⁴” Numerous agencies operate legally as massage salons, matchmaking offices, service companies or simply as escort agencies. They are located near the outskirts or in the center, wherever the clients can get to quickly and conveniently.⁵ The agencies operate within the same location for numerous years, although the people who manage them can change. On the one hand, it arises from the investments made, which tailor the places to the specificity of the sex business and which incline the next owner/tenant to use the ready infrastructure. On the other hand, it is about using the effect of embedding a given address in the clients’ awareness when they are searching for commercial sexual services. Agencies usually occupy whole detached houses, apartment buildings or whole floors of a building. They are often marked with a neon sign, although it is not always immediately

⁴ Codes refer to subsequent interviewees. Detailed characteristics of the interviewees are presented in the *Annex*.

⁵ The clients are often provided with special parking spaces, covered from the street with high fences and gates, to get the higher feeling of intimacy.

obvious to passers-by what the purpose of the place is. The interiors are specially prepared for such activities, and they are larger than in *the apartments*. The center, and at the same time the representative part of an agency, is *the lounge*, where the clients start their visit. There are poles for dancing, used by the female workers, and a bar with alcohol. Apart from *the lounge*, there are also from a few to a dozen or so rooms (out of which each should have a separate bathroom with a shower or bath) devoted to the intimate meetings between the clients and the women. The rooms and *the lounge* are the only places in the agency to which the clients have access. The remaining part of the agency is reserved only for the workers: rooms for the women (where they wait for clients, get dressed, or simply live), the bathroom for the employers, a kitchen, and a room for the security guards and the agency's *manager*.⁶ The establishment is characterized by a distinctive interior design, with warm, dark colors, mirrors, accessories made of glass, metal, marble, and leather, as well as images of an erotic nature. Agencies usually hire from a few to several dozen women. These agencies operate mostly at night; however, some accept clients only during the day. They usually hire *resident* security workers who are on site all the time. They also cooperate with security companies that intervene when required. The cost of a visit to an agency is higher than in the case of *an apartment* (but a lot depends on the venue's quality). Despite the relatively high price for the company of women, additional expenditures are appreciated (e.g. the purchase of cocktails, tips for the female worker).

There are also nightclubs within the sex services market. When compared to the agencies, they put greater emphasis on the entertaining function, offering – apart from the meetings with women – various other possibilities of spending free time (e.g. lap dances, a swimming pool, billiards, a sauna). Thanks to that, the club obtains a wider range and is seen by the clients as a place for varied, not only sexual entertainment, fun, and relaxation, but also adventure (Ślęzak 2010b). Some clubs are open (egalitarian), while others are exclusive, for only verified and recommended guests, who are provided with special VIP zones with a higher quality of service.

The described types of venues create a continuum: from places where (quick) sex is seen as the only need of the clients (underfunded *apartments*), through venues where the clients are also provided with additional attractions that enhance their experiences (agencies), to premises where access to commercial sexual relations is only one of a high number of possibilities that create this special atmosphere of luxurious and exclusive clubs for men. The basis for the differentiation of the premises that offer commercial sex services are constituted by the different assumptions of their owners about what men seek in such places, and thus what they should offer.

⁶ Regarding the square surface that particular agencies have at their disposal, they differ in the number and layout of rooms. However, the basic functions are still performed there.

1.1.2. The provision of sex services in Poland and legal regulations

The Polish legal system is constructed on the basis of abolitionist assumptions. In 1952, the Polish People's Republic ratified the UN Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others. According to its provisions, Poland was obliged to revoke all rights, regulations and legal provisions that required the registration of people dealing with prostitution (or those who were suspected). It also concerned the requirement to hold particular documents and undergo specific control procedures. Therefore, in 1952, Poland officially stopped the official monitoring of prostitution. Furthermore, sections and offices for fighting prostitution that functioned within the bodies of the militia were liquidated (Antoniszyn, Marek 1985: 37). However, in reality, the people who provided sex services still underwent some intensive surveillance from the militia. This was not only for social or moral reasons, but it was also caused by the desire to gather information on Polish and, most of all, foreign clients and exchange transactions. Hence, it is hard to state that the Polish People's Republic met the requirements of the abolitionist convention. As a result of system transformations related to the process of democratization and the introduction of free-market principles, the interest of the police⁷ in prostitution declined and changed in character. Therefore, there was a field for the actual introduction of the Convention's principles.

Pursuant to current Polish law, prostitution is not illegal. However, the deprivation of liberty for a term of between 1 and 10 years is applied to everyone who by force, illegal threat or deceit, or by abusing a relationship of dependence or by taking advantage of a critical situation, subjects another person to practice prostitution (Art. 203 of the Penal Code). Furthermore, whoever, in order to derive material benefit, induces another person to practice prostitution or facilitates it (Art. 204 § 1 of the Penal Code) or just derives material benefits from prostitution practiced by another person (Art. 204 § 2 of the Penal Code) shall be subject to the penalty of deprivation of liberty for up to 3 years. The presented legal provisions criminalize third parties, which has a substantial impact on how the working conditions of people who provide sex services are organized. It is especially visible in the indoor sex sector. In Poland, it is not possible to legally carry out a business that would offer sex services (even if the sex workers' rights were respected). Escort agencies operate despite that, because some managers can take care of the artificial fulfillment of legal provisions. This is how they are left undisturbed by the legal enforcement bodies. It happens through, e.g., the registration of a business enterprise, for example, in the form of a trading and service company, a motel,

⁷ The police were designated with a package of acts in 1990, replacing the militia. Therefore, the structure of the police apparatus was adapted to the standards of a democratic state.

the provision of lonely hearts services, or performing massages. Officially, these agencies are legal companies that also hire employees. Agreements include positions typical for the above-mentioned branches, so the women work as cleaning ladies, receptionists, bartenders, dancers or masseurs, and they officially do not provide prostitution services. In some cases, they even sign a statement that they will not provide sexual services at work (Ślęzak 2017: 241).

However, it needs to be emphasized that the agencies pose an object of interest and controls of various bodies, especially the police (Wasilewski 2007: 95). Police officers control them in terms of the legality of the operated activity, the possession of drugs, the trafficking of alcohol, cigarettes, or weapon, the prostitution of minors, the prostitution of illegal immigrants, connections with criminal organizations, and procuring or facilitating prostitution, pimping, holding someone against her will and forcing her into prostitution, as well as violations of the order, and sanitary or fire prevention regulations in the operation of a business enterprise. The inspection takes place with the cooperation of representatives of the authorized bodies, including, among others: the Fire Service, Border Guards, the Tax Office, representatives of local government bodies, the National Labor Inspectorate, the District Sanitary and Epidemiological Station, or the Construction Site Inspector. However, it needs to be kept in mind that while the agency is run pursuant to legal provisions, and the female workers do not make testimonies confirming the facilitation of prostitution or procuring, handing out penalties for the crimes is impossible. Thus, often the only consequence from the performed inspection is posed by the difficulties in operating an agency (e.g. the order to carry out some renovation work adapting the premises to fire protection regulations), reflected in its financial loss.

There are also agencies within the Polish sex business that do not even try to meet the legal regulations (e.g. by registering their enterprises as a massage salon). Their operation in a given city is possible until the police collect evidence against the people that manage them.

1.2. THEORETICAL INSPIRATIONS FOR THE RESEARCH

1.2.1. Prostitution versus sex work

The complexity of the prostitution phenomenon and its organizational forms means that there are analyses based on the traditions of various scientific disciplines and different theories. Regardless of this variety, the contemporary discourse around the provision of sex services is determined by two opposing perspectives. One of them is the abolitionist position, formulated by radical feminists.

The other one is the perspective adopted by the sex-positive feminists and female sex workers (Vance, Snitow 1984; Nagle 1997). Each of them sees the genesis, consequences, and both the social and moral meanings of the provision of sex services in a different manner (O'Neill 2001: 82).

The perspective shared by the proponents of the radical course of feminism⁸ is based on the belief that prostitution is a result from both sex inequalities and the normalization of aggressive male sexuality (Sloan, Wahab 2000). The women who provide sex services are victims of the unfair and patriarchal social system which allows men to exploit their bodies (Overall 1992; Raymond 2006). Therefore, prostitution is the essence of male domination and the subordination, degradation, and victimization of women (cf. Dworkin 1993; Pheterson 1993; Kesler 2002; Scoular 2004). This way of thinking leads to a statement that prostitution violates human rights and poses a type of slavery⁹ (Pateman 1988; Overall 1992; Barry 1995; Jeffreys 1997). Therefore, by definition, it is a form of oppression, and it is impossible for a woman to give her free consent to this type of objectification or to choose it consciously.¹⁰

The primary motive in the radical feminists' discourse is violence (cf. Weitzer 2005: 212). The women experience this violence from aggressive clients, third parties (wanting to derive gains from prostitution) as well as from the state and enforcement agencies. Prostitution is equated to rape and called *paid rape* that takes place during a meeting with a client, who pays for the right to use any forms of sexual violence towards a woman (Dworkin 1993; Jeffreys 2001: 38).

The presented views provide a basis for designing particular actions intended to abolish prostitution, at the same time providing the women with a possibility to earn money in other, respected professions. It has been postulated that sanctions towards people involved in prostitution be removed, while at the same time penalizing those who use such services or derive gains (Sloan, Wahab 2000: 461). Such actions were undertaken in, e.g., Sweden in 1999, where they introduced a system that penalized clients who paid for sex services. Proponents of radical feminism are also against the legalization of prostitution. In their belief, such a solution preserves the low social status of the women, bringing them down to the role of a sex object (Raymond 1999, 2006; Jeffreys 2001: 39; Ekberg 2004).

⁸ The most famous proponents of this perspective include, among others: Kathleen Barry, Catharine MacKinnon, Carole Pateman, Christine Overall, Andrea Dworkin and such organizations as Women Hurt in Systems of Prostitution Engaged in Revolt (WHISPER), Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW), Standing Against Global Exploitation (SAGE).

⁹ Therefore, the women involved in prostitution are called *sex slaves* or *prostituted women* (Dworkin 1993; Witowicz 2001: 45; Dziuban, Ratecka 2018).

¹⁰ Within the field of radical feminists, prostitution is often identified with human trafficking (Overall 1992; Jeffreys 1997; Sloan, Wahab 2000: 461).

The radical feminist perspective has provided inspiration for many pieces of research into the phenomenon of prostitution. However, its results are criticized by the scientific community and representatives of sex work organizations. The main objections are connected with the excessive ideological involvement of the researchers, who are not always reliable when it comes to their empirical research. According to the critics, a great deal of the research is carried out as “subordinated to a thesis,” ignoring the cases and data that are not compliant with the perspective of prostitution as a form of violence and domination over women (Weitzer 2005: 214).

What is more, critics believe that various negative phenomena described by the proponents of radical feminism do not result from the essence of prostitution. It is more to do with the limited protection from the police, and the penalization, stigmatization, and marginalization of women providing sex services (Kesler 2002; Weitzer 2005: 215; Agustin 2007; Hardy, Kingston, Sanders 2010). They also notice that these feminists readily accept the assumption regarding the non-existence of free-will, that prostitution is a form of forced victimization of women. The fact that someone does not understand and cannot imagine choosing sex work does not mean the conscious selection of this profession is impossible (Kesler 2002: 223).

Another perspective that influences the shape of the contemporary discourse related to the provision of sex services is the concept of prostitution as sex work.

The term “sex work” was invented¹¹ by Carol Leigh (1997), a prostitute from the United States of America in 1970, and popularized by movements fighting for the rights of people providing sex services in the USA and Western Europe. The origin of this term lies in the social movement that has its roots both in feminism and in the world of prostitution. It covers various actions which bear the hallmarks of sexual activity, undertaken as a result of a commercial transaction, such as different forms of prostitution, erotic massage, telephone or Internet sex, striptease, go-go dancing, lap dancing, starring in porn movies, nude modeling via webcam, and performing nude peepshows. Despite the fact that the term “sex work” has a broader range, it is often adopted in scientific publications and numerous official international documents¹² as a neutral synonym for prostitution (Leigh 1997, cf. Jeffreys 2005; LAC 2002: 3). The use of this term is intended to support the destigmatization and normalization of this phenomenon.

The *sex positive* discourse of feminism originated in the objection towards the radical feminists. It was initiated by women providing sex services, who felt excluded from the discussion, which in their opinion was based on a traditional vision of women and their sexuality (Błońska 2011: 69). While criticizing the dominating and patronizing discourse, they stressed that prostitution does not need to be entangled with violence. However, it is more probable when it is criminalized and stigmatized (Brewis, Linstead 2002: 319).

¹¹ This word was used by Leigh in the article presenting the genesis of the term (1997).

¹² The term “sex work” is also preferred by e.g. Amnesty International.

According to activists from the organizations and unions fighting for the sex workers' rights (e.g. COYOTE – Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics, HIRE – Hooking Is Real Employment), the majority of women *choose* this way of earning money (they are not being *forced* to do this), even if it is illegal in a given country (Jenness 1990: 405). Therefore, these organizations advocate for women's right to decide about their own body and life paths (Błońska 2011: 69). Hence, the concept of sex work is also an expression of resistance against the limitations and restrictions imposed by society on individuals. It is a symbol of moral autonomy, but also a threat to the “patriarchal control over female sexuality.” That control can be seen in the stigma that remains regarding female sex workers as well as preventive-control actions performed by the state (Poławski 2012: 271–272). According to the proponents of this approach, it is not the nature of sex work that threatens the individuals who carry it out, but the lack of organizational support for the workers as well as the existing legal solutions. From this perspective, it is crucial not to penalize sex workers or third parties but to recognize the subjectivity and agency of sex workers. Any empirical research should include their experiences and points of view (Agustin 2007; Hardy, Kingston, Sanders 2010).

The first mentioned (abolitionist) perspective is dominant in the previous research carried out in Poland. Concepts of social deviation and pathology provided the theoretical basis for the research performed by sociologists, pedagogues, psychologists, psychiatrists, sexologists, criminologists, and lawyers (Jasińska 1967, 1976; Matysiak 1967; Podgórecki 1969, 1976; Kojder 1976; Syrek 1979; Antoniszyn, Marek 1985; Kowalczyk-Jamnicka 1998; Kurzępa 2001, 2005; Jędrzejko 2006a, 2006b; Gardian 2007; Pospiszyl 2008; Welskop 2013). Therefore, the main point of the researchers' interest was first of all the causes of prostitution. This manner in which the research was designed was often justified by preventive and rehabilitation purposes. Identifying individual and social conditions of prostitution was intended to facilitate the development of aid programs aimed at people in danger of “falling by the wayside,” and those who wanted to return from this wayside to “normal society.”

There are three overlapping views on people who provide sex services that can be reconstructed from the mentioned papers (Dziuban, Ratecka 2012). First of all, they are deviants who break the social norms and become involved in morally reprehensible actions. Secondly, they are people who are sick, in need medical treatment or supervision. Thirdly, they are victims of factors that they cannot influence; these might be related to being a member of a socially disadvantaged family, their peers, and the economic situation on the macro- and micro-social scale. Hence, they need protection and rehabilitation. The same people providing sex services are denied the possibility to make decisions or take action, regardless of their actual situation or how they became involved in prostitution (cf. Dziuban, Ratecka 2012). The discussed approaches also ignore the differentiation that is so characteristic of prostitution (cf. Brewis, Linstead 2002: 309).

The above-mentioned perspectives of defining prostitution versus sex work allow us to see the extreme differences between particular opinions on and interpretations of those phenomena. Discussions between the proponents and opponents of different views (i.e., representatives of various social organizations and movements, people providing sex services, scientists, journalists, and politicians) can be interpreted in the categories of the arena of concern (Clarke 1990: 20; 1991: 133; Kacperczyk 2005: 178) around the definition of the primary activity – the provision of sexual services. Involvement in the discourse within the arena is of a pragmatic dimension and proves the overlapping interests of various social worlds (Kacperczyk 2005: 179). Each of them is interested in getting the others to accept their definition of what prostitution/sex work is and what should be done about it.

This book is an attempt to go beyond the dichotomies present in the literature (both in the sphere of theory and empirical research): exploitation *versus* work, pathology and social problem *versus* the provision of sex services. While carrying out the research project, I tried not to represent any one vision of prostitution, remaining open to the interpretation framework adopted by the participants in the case of their worlds. The research that I conducted suggests that these perspectives were present in the experiences of the people researched, and they were sometimes “activated” in interactions with various social actors (cf. Sanders 2006: 297).

1.2.2. The theoretical perspective of the research

I adopted a micro-social perspective in the research project that is the basis of this publication. My purpose was to research the phenomenon of providing sex services through the prism of the interactions between partners in an escort agency, seen as a place of work. Thus, I treated the escort agencies as organizations where interactions that influence the course, time, and level of involvement of the female workers in prostitution take place. Such an analytical perspective required an attitude of respect towards the life choices made by the participants, which is a necessary condition for accepting their subjectivity. Therefore, the publication is a study in the field of micro-sociology, focused on the interactions and processes that take place in small social groups, in this case, escort agencies. A consequence of this choice is the focus on the perspective of the researched individuals, the ways they experience everyday life, and dealing with various aspects of the adopted manner of earning money. Hence, the provision of sex services is analyzed in terms of a social action. The macro-social and structural conditions of the researched phenomenon set the background for the main course of the consideration, which is certainly located on the micro-level.

Defining the escort agencies as a place of work emerged during the field research in this environment. This perspective was taken for granted by the actors

who were directly involved in running the venues (the managers, the people providing sex services, the security workers, and the bartenders). It was also communicated as such to the new workers within the process of professional socialization. It should be emphasized that perceiving prostitution as work did not need to be related to the knowledge and acceptance of ideological beliefs regarding sex work or putting forward any postulates connected with its legalization.¹³ The participants' use of the terms "work," "workplace," and "to work" allowed them to destigmatize the actions they undertake both in the eyes of others (e.g. the researchers) and in their own eyes. This helped the social actors regain the feeling of agency, and to shape particular elements of *the work situation* actively. In this sense, the researched people's interpretation of prostitution was similar to the concept of *dirty work* proposed by Hughes (1964).

The analytical framework of prostitution as work may, in my belief, enrich the reflexion on this phenomenon, especially in its organized form, in venues, agencies, and private flats. Although the operation of escort agencies violates the social norms related to the sphere of sexuality, we cannot ignore the fact that such places are elements of the reality that surrounds us. They are organized social entities, they have specific structures, principles of operation, and a division of work and profits, while the actors adopt various social roles. These organizations are also created and recreated every day through the interactions. The organizational context of the provision of sex services was rarely thoroughly analyzed in previous studies. It is one of the purposes of this work to fill in that gap.

Adopting such an analytical perspective also allows me to shift the stress from searching for the causes of prostitution to studying the process of providing sexual services, wherever it takes place. Hence, it is possible to complete the results of previous research (mainly quantitative in nature), pointing to the social, economic or psychological factors that contribute to a person's involvement in prostitution. This complementation is related to the interactions between *novices* and other people who are also participants of this social world. Apart from the basic actions that the female workers undertake (i.e., fulfilling the sexual needs of their clients), there are also many other interactions in the escort agencies: with other sex workers, security workers, bartenders, telephonists, as well as with the agency manager, who determines the applicable rules and who decides on "hiring" or "firing" workers. The everyday experiences of remaining in the agency are related to playing social roles that result from being a member of the organization. The adoption of the micro-sociological perspective allows me to analyze the group processes that take place, where several (or a dozen) people cooperate within a common and not very sizable space. In turn, looking at the escort agencies from the perspective of sociology of work allows

¹³ The interviewees tended to be advocates of decriminalizing the provision of sexual services, although they did not know the term.

me to pay attention to the processes of adaptation and socialization, and the interactions with supervisors, partners, and clients. They influence the intensity and time of being involved in prostitution, as well as the further fates of people providing the sex services. The dynamics of the interactions between the actors of the world of escort agencies is of crucial importance for someone's continued involvement in prostitution, but it also influences the shape of this process and the potential impact on the female workers. This results from the fact that it is the fellow female workers who – apart from the clients – provide the main interaction partners for women providing sex services. They are the ones who introduce *the novices* into the specificity of the work, take part in the process of defining the role, and they can contribute to this person staying in the venue or going somewhere else. This makes a clear differentiation between working in the agency and the individual provision of sex services. The first is of a team character and should be researched as such. Thanks to such an approach, the research may draw special attention to the interactions between the participants of the world of agencies and their meaning in the context of both organizational order and actions related to the provision of sex services.

As a result, adopting the proposed analytical perspective allows me to look at prostitution not only as a condition and effect of certain circumstances (which limits the interests of researchers in identifying the declared reasons and motives for getting involved in prostitution), but also as a process taking place within organizational surroundings, in the case of this research – in escort agencies.

The theoretical reference framework that inspired for analyses of the gathered empirical materials was provided by selected concepts from the area of the interpretative paradigm, especially symbolic interactionism (Blumer 1969). I was also inspired by the interactionist sociology of work (cf. Konecki 1988), treating jobs as a social interaction (Hughes 1964: 68).

An especially interesting theoretical concept that deepens this notion is the theory of the social organization of medical work by Anselm Strauss et al. (1985). It developed the sociology of work inspired with achievements of the Chicago School of Sociology,¹⁴ especially Hughes (cf. Konecki 1988). For Strauss' team, work is impossible without interactions (Konecki 2013: XI). Therefore, while analyzing work, they did not adopt the occupations, professions or organizational structure perspective. For them, work is synonymous with the actions that take place during interactions between individuals (Strauss et al. 1985: 238). The data collected within the project allowed them to differentiate numerous types of med-

¹⁴ It is worth noting that researchers from the Chicago School of Sociology (Becker 2009; Bryan 1965) adopted the perspective of researching the deviant phenomena (among others prostitution) as occupations, focusing on identification of such interdependent aspects of jobs as carriers, work situations and networks, impacting the shape of the undertaken actions (West, Austrin 2002: 497–498).

ical work, carried out by various social actors (medical staff of different levels, patients, family). The researchers noticed that it is impossible to perform work without the cooperation of numerous people, with constant interactions between each other: negotiations, renegotiations, persuasion, and the communication of information and orders (Strauss et al. 1985).

The perspective developed by Hughes and Strauss, recommending that the researcher focus on the work itself, its features and qualities, is a proposal that differs from the main courses of the sociology of work. At the same time, Strauss adopted a comprehensive definition of work, and perceived it in all its undertakings, even if the involved individuals did not think of them as of work (Strauss et al. 1985: 290). This approach is extremely interesting in the context of the analyzed phenomenon of work provided by escort agencies, and it acts as a core for the theoretical inspiration adopted in the book. Therefore, in my research, I did not consider whether and to what extent prostitution might be an occupation. Instead, I analyzed particular actions undertaken by the actors of this social world, inspired by the approach adopted by Strauss et al. (1985). Their perspective embeds itself in the understanding of an organization, based on symbolic interactionism. Organizations are perceived as being designed, manufactured, maintained and transformed in the everyday interactions of their members (Konecki 2006: 11). Therefore, organizations are a joint venture between many groups and individuals who are in the process of continuously creating and maintaining a collective action (Konecki 2006: 13). They form a dynamic setting within a broader dynamic setting, open to external influences and exerting an impact on the organizational surroundings (Konecki 2006: 12).

Some important notions and concepts, which gave the analysis of the collected data a sense of order, included the concepts of emotional labor (Hochschild 2009), career (Becker et al. 1961; Hughes 1964, 1997; Konecki 1988; Prus, Irini 1988; Prus, Grills 2003; Becker 2009; Goffman 2011), stigma (Goffman 1963), impression management (Goffman 1956, 2000), interaction order (Goffman 1969, 2006, 2010) and selected concepts of the sociology of work.

Finally, I would like to stress that I made some linguistic choices in my publication. I do not use the word “prostitute” unless it is a direct quote from one of the interviewees or other authors. This results from the pejorative tone of this term, which (like its vulgar equivalents) is a synonym for a moral and social fall (Chancer 1993: 159; Płatek 2013, 2014). I treat prostitution as one of the roles played by the researched women. It does not determine their identity; it merely points to the undertaken actions. I also use the term “a person providing sex services,” assuming that sex actions are services within the commercial sex market. However, the term I use most often is “a female worker.” It does not originate in feminist theories which support the *sex work* perspective, but in the sociology of work, where considering the work facility (an escort agency), the people providing services therein are actually workers.

1.3. METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

1.3.1. Ethnographic research and grounded theory methodology – a synergy of methods

The purpose of the research was to analyze the social construction of sex work in escort agencies. In order to do that, I wanted to research the working conditions¹⁵ which set the context for interactions between particular categories of participants, as well as the interactions themselves and their dynamics. The basic action and the source of income for all workers in the agency is the work of women providing sex services during meetings with clients. The conditions and principles of those meetings (thus, the work rules) are determined by the individuals who manage the venue. Running the agency in accordance with their vision, they shape the organizational culture (Konecki 2007; Zbiegień-Maciąg 2013). However, the execution of those principles depends to a great extent on the informal norms and sanctions that are applicable in the group of women providing sex services in a given venue. They are not only direct coworkers, but they are also teachers and inspectors of the role of a female sex worker. Thus, to understand how the work situation of women is organized in escort agencies, and which conditions they depend on, all of those elements should be considered, i.e., the contextual elements, the objective work conditions, the processes of interaction and the creation of meanings, negotiations, cooperation, and rivalry between the agency workers as well as their interactions with clients. As a result, the *work situation* – which the workers are both the participants and co-creators of – is generated and maintained. The *work situation* may be thus treated as a result of collective operations undertaken by all participants of this world.

Achieving the research objective required the selection of appropriate methods and techniques for collecting and analyzing the data. I employed qualitative research methods in my project. They are especially useful in the case of studies on marginalized groups, related to difficult topics, and when there are problems with gaining access to the respondents (Silverman 2007: 59; Flick 2010: 92). The adoption of qualitative methods for data collection allows one to grasp the perspective of the social actors “from the inside.” It is possible thanks to empathic understanding (*Verstehen*) and suspension of judgments accepted in advance in relation to the researched phenomena. Therefore, we can grasp the people’s mean-

¹⁵ The working conditions are composed of the equipment, the development of the agency’s space, its location, as well as the content and rules of work, the system of penalties and sanctions when the rules are broken.

ings and understand how they create the world around them (Miles, Huberman 2000: 7–10; Flick 2010: 13).

While creating the concept of research among indoor sex workers, I decided to combine the ethnographic method and grounded theory methodology. I think that both these approaches are very helpful when researching difficult fields which require flexible tools for collecting and analyzing data. These methods offer a package of solutions and instructions that help the research cope with the methodological challenges emerging in these kinds of projects.

While planning and conducting the ethnographic research, I was mainly inspired by the achievements of the sociologists from the Chicago School (and their continuators). They promoted an active research approach, according to the concept by Park, based on “getting your hands dirty in real research” (Gobo 2008: 35). It meant leaving the offices, going into the field and observing real situations in the urban space. The researchers were interested in, e.g., the social organization of the city and transfers of population between particular zones (Park and Burgess) or the exploration of the least socially respected occupations and the roles of “deviants” (Hughes; Silverman 2007: 80). This course also covers the study by Becker, devoted to marihuana users (Becker 2009) as well as numerous projects related to subcultures. One of the research areas was also sexuality in Chicago, as a sexual laboratory (Heap 2003). Examples of such projects include works by Reckless (*The Natural History of Vice Areas in Chicago* from 1925 and *Vice in Chicago* from 1933). They resulted from ethnographic observations of the lives of women involved in the provision of sex services and their clients. The tradition of the Chicago School of Sociology has exerted an influence on subsequent generations of researchers. A continuator of this way of conducting research work (both in the methodological dimensions, i.e., interactionist ethnography,¹⁶ and the themes of research related to sexuality) is, e.g., Prus (cf. Kleinknecht 2007: 222). He is the co-author of a publication entitled *Hookers, Rounders, and Desk Clerks: The Social Organization of the Hotel Community* (Prus, Irini 1988). The book is an ethnography of a hotel community, where particular participants are involved in the provision of sex services in various ways. This approach is interesting as numerous pieces of research on deviations are focused on the analysis of the individuals’ involvement in a single role or one sphere of activity (Kleinknecht 2007: 230). Prus and Irini analyzed the social actors caught in various roles, interaction systems and small social groups (Prus, Irini 1988; Kleinknecht 2007: 231). Thus, *Hookers, Round-*

¹⁶ The interactionist ethnography focuses on the researcher’s empathetic understanding of the social reality that the people live in. Its purpose is to identify a system of symbols that provide human actions with meaning, as active actors co-creating the reality (Angrosino 2010: 31). Therefore, in the interactionist tradition, the ethnographic research aims at discovering meanings, which are attached by social actors to their and others’ actions (cf. Prus 1996).

ers, and Desk Clerks is an example of how the ethnographic approach can bring a new look to the phenomenon of prostitution.

Nowadays, there are many types of ethnography (Atkinson et al. 2001). However, several common features can be pointed out here. These are:

- working in the field, in the participants' life surroundings (Angrosino 2010: 45). Ethnography requires overt or covert participation for a longer period in the everyday lives of the researched participants, observing their actions, listening to their conversations, or asking questions, i.e., collecting the available data which will allow the researcher to understand the researched phenomenon (Hammersley, Atkinson 2000: 11);

- the personalized character of the research – while gathering data, the researcher's last resort is a single tool – themselves and their ability to establish interactions with the participants (Angrosino 2010: 66). Being an observer and a participant of the researched person's life at the same time, they try to establish a long-standing and direct relationship with them (Angrosino 2010: 45; Flick 2010: 14) and achieve intimate familiarity (Kleinknecht 2007: 282).

- (more) democratic relationships in the field based on the dialog between the researcher and the participants;

- combining several techniques of data collection, where a leading role is played by participant observation (Angrosino 2010: 106).

In the case of publications that present the principles of ethnographic research, the authors highlight that these types of research cannot be programmed as, in practice, the researcher encounters a plethora of surprising situations (Hammersley, Atkinson 2000: 34). It is both a burden and an opportunity. According to Prus, work in the field is a chance for the researcher to learn as much from and about the people as possible (Kleinknecht 2007: 258). For this purpose, it is necessary to focus on activities and try to understand *what* people do, and *how* they do it. Hence, the basic questions that lead the researcher in the field are: "What exactly is going on, how does it take place, how do people enter into the process, and what do others do? Where is it similar and where is it different?" (Kleinknecht 2007: 231). Such insight into the lives (work) of the researched women provided me with lots of rich information that I analyzed with grounded theory methodology.

Grounded theory methodology gave me both a general framework which specified the subsequent stages of the project and particular data analysis procedures. In my analytical work, I mostly made use of the procedures proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), and then those developed and complemented by Strauss (1987) alone, and together with Corbin (Strauss, Corbin 1990, 1994). The methodological inspiration for me was also the constructivist version of grounded theory methodology proposed by Charmaz (2006), especially in the context of her deliberations regarding the process of collecting empirical data. When compared to the classic approaches to grounded theory, the constructivist version puts a stronger emphasis on the significance of the personal involvement of the researcher in the research

process (Gorzko 2008: 390). According to Charmaz, by collecting “rich” (detailed, focused and full) data, a researcher obtains solid material for building a significant analysis and can create grounded theories (Charmaz 2006: 14). The combination of ethnography and grounded theory methodology, thanks to the synergy effect, can improve the research process quality (Charmaz 2006: 21–25). It helps to fight several weak sides of the ethnographic research, such as: uncritically adopting the research participants’ views; lengthy unfocused forays into the field setting; superficial, random data collection; and reliance on disciplinary stock categories. Grounded theory procedures are also a source of systematic instructions that help to keep control of the research process and allow detailed exploration of what lies behind the observed phenomena (Charmaz 2006: 25).

The research that poses the basis for this publication had the form of an ethnography, the course of which was governed by the analytical procedures of grounded theory, the constant comparative method, and theoretical sampling. The collected empirical data (transcriptions and notes from interviews and observations, as well as additional materials) were subsequently subjected to open and then selective coding. It was at this stage where Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (Atlas.ti) proved to be helpful. It made it easier to order and integrate various types of data, and to carry out the coding procedures (cf. Niedbalski, Ślęzak 2012; Niedbalski 2014). While analyzing the data, I also adopted axial coding, based on the coding paradigm. An important inspiration for me was the conditional/consequential matrix. What is more, I wrote memos from the very beginning, which I sorted systematically. An auxiliary tool that supported conceptualization also included diagrams, graphs, and simple fourfold tables presenting the connections between categories. As they are of a secondary character, the majority of them are not mentioned in this publication.

1.3.2. Data collection techniques

I employed two main techniques in the research project, i.e., observations and unstructured interviews. These techniques are often exploited together (Goode, Hatt 1965: 55; Adler, Adler 1994: 377; Konecki 2000: 145–155) due to the positive synergy effect (Hammersley, Atkinson 2000: 139–140) that I also observed in my project. Observing, hanging around, listening carefully and watching the actions that surrounded me (even if the participants did not identify them as being potentially interesting for me) provided knowledge about the researched environment. It also sensitized me to the notions that were developed at further stages of the research. These observations also allowed the workers to *get used to* my presence, which made it easier to establish a relationship with them. It contributed to the development and maintenance of trust, which is of vital importance during field research (cf. Konecki 2000: 172; Babbie 2004: 326–327; Ślęzak 2018a). What is

more, the observations allowed for a “reconnaissance” among the agency workers and the selection of people that I then tried to carry out the unstructured interviews with (with varying results) (cf. Hammersley, Atkinson 2000: 64). Staying within the agency’s space was also advantageous in terms of saturating the interview topics. It was often the case (e.g. while waiting for an interview, or after an interview, when I stayed to “normalize” the situation) that I was able to observe what was happening in the venue, thus remaining close to the events that I was interested in. The observed actions inspired me to ask questions and vice versa – the interviews sensitized me to what I should observe (Patton 1997). This process was often supported by the participants themselves when they referred to events that I had (or had not) witnessed, or when they explained a current event by recalling their words from the interview.

1.3.2.1. Observation in escort agencies

The first challenge when starting a project is to enter the participants’ world. Numerous researchers who have carried out empirical studies on difficult topics admit that they needed much more time than they had planned for that stage (Sandberg, Cops 2013: 181). It was similar in my case (Ślęzak 2018c). I started the field stage of the study with reconnaissance (Hammersley, Atkinson 2000: 48) and attempts to get to know potential participants. Therefore, I used generally accessible information: telephone numbers from small ads in the local press as well as phone numbers and e-mail addresses published on websites with advertisements regarding sex work. I also tried to locate places where outdoor prostitution develops and venues offering sex services which operate within the space of the researched city. As a result of those actions, I prepared a draft map of such places, and afterward, I conducted non-participant observations.

The elaborated reconnaissance allowed me to identify the specificity of the local escort agency market and to perform an initial classification of the venues in terms of various qualities (location, number of female workers, prestige among clients, price lists). As a result, the environment that I had thought would be quite homogeneous showed internal differentiation and hierarchical order.

When beginning this stage of the research, I visited a few agencies hoping that I could find somewhere to start my work. However, my endeavors were met with indifference, suspicion, disregard or even hostility. In the case of women involved in outdoor prostitution, I managed to obtain some declarations that they would co-operate, but only on condition that I paid for the interviews, which I could not agree to. I did not manage to establish any contact that would lead to the possibility of starting my research in eight months of “hanging around” people providing sex services. In hindsight, I think that the main reason for that failure was lack of goodwill from the *gatekeepers* (Hammersley, Atkinson 2000:

73; Angrosino 2010: 112), who saw me as an intruder. Regarding the applicable legal regulations, the agency workers usually do not want a stranger in their venue, who – having access to various data – could potentially use the information against them. In addition, some agencies have links with the criminal world or entertain people who would not want to be recognized by a sociologist hanging around the agency. The fundamental principle of each type of sex work is confidentiality.

A breakthrough moment in carrying out the project was meeting a person who agreed to introduce me to an agency owner. Thanks to his intercession and his willingness to vouch for me, I got a chance to enter the premises. In the beginning, I was allowed short visits in the agency, in his presence. Over the course of time, when I became accepted and trusted, I started to go on my own, for much longer observations lasting several hours. The fact I had become an acquaintance of the gatekeeper allowed me to meet other people, some of whom became my informal guardians (Hammersley, Atkinson 2000: 74).

The main part of the research was accomplished in the first escort agency, where thanks to my establishing very good contacts, it was possible to carry out some observations over an extended period (May 2007–October 2011) and numerous interviews. It was one of the largest venues in the city, employing almost thirty female workers in that period. It enjoyed a good reputation among both the female workers and the clients. Despite that fact that during the reconnaissance stage I obtained ample information about the differentiation of escort agencies, it was not until I collected the data in the first venue that I gradually started to discover new criteria of division as regards the working conditions offered to the women providing sex services (cf. Chapter 2). Based on the emerging categories, I conducted theoretical sampling of other venues to be analyzed. It should be stressed that the choice (in the case of both the venues and the interviewees) was of a specific and delayed character. It means that although I knew the type of place (or the kind of person with particular qualities) where I would continue with my research, often whole weeks or months passed until I was able to execute my plan. Thanks to the gatekeepers' help, I succeeded in carrying out comparative observations in three venues (August 2008–December 2011). They differed from the first agency mostly in how the work is organized. In this context, it is also worth mentioning that while making use of the gatekeepers' help and leaning on their networks of contacts, you open one door but at the same time, close others. In the case of my research, being introducing to venues by the first gatekeeper (and other ones that I met thanks to him) allowed me to carry out the research, but at the same time it determined a limited circle that I could move within. The agencies that they had no contact with were inaccessible to me. For example, I did not manage to get safe access to a venue where the *oppressive* treatment of female workers was applied (cf. Chapter 2). However, within the course of the research, I met a key informant who provided me with

some information about how such agencies operate. It needs to be emphasized that, thanks to the selection of venues and interviewees, while carrying out the project I obtained data regarding all the most important agencies that operated in the city. The performed observations and interviews also include information about the *work situation* in agencies situated in larger Polish cities as well as in London, Amsterdam and smaller towns in Portugal, Germany, and the Czech Republic.

The application of theoretical sampling also meant taking care to include the daily, weekly, monthly and annual work rhythm in the escort agencies within the observation plan (cf. Hammersley, Atkinson 2000: 56–59). I attempted to reflect this differentiation in the research by returning to the field multiple times and comparing the changes that were taking place there. When arranging meetings (interviews and observations), I took care to visit the agency on different weekdays and at different times. As suggested by the collected data, there might be entirely different contextual conditions for interactions that the *work situation* is comprised of. The observations and interviews were usually carried out between 12.00–18.00 (in the case of venues that operated during the day) and 21.00–3.00 (during night shifts). In the case of the day shift, those were the hours of relatively low *traffic* of clients, which started to increase after 16.00, when many of them finished their work. It was a convenient time for me to carry out the interviews and to observe the relationships between the female workers, who were waiting for their clients. During the day, clients usually visited the venue alone, so the observations at that time allowed me to identify the specificity of interactions in dyads, a female worker with a client. In the evening and at night, the clients usually visited the agency in groups. Hence, I had an opportunity to observe the dynamics of interactions between the clients *in the lounge*, while they were choosing the female workers. It was also a chance to observe the cooperation among all types of workers in order to adequately direct the client's visit to the venue. On the other hand, the “fuss” that accompanied the night work was a big challenge for me, especially at the beginning of my project. While reflecting on the differentiation of work rhythms of the agency, I attempted to carry out observations on weekdays and during weekends, which were usually characterized by a larger number of clients and different dynamics of the relationships between workers. I was able to observe similar periods of the clients' changing interest (but also the attendance of the female workers) in a monthly rhythm (the greatest *traffic* in the venue usually emerged several days after payment of salaries), but also the annual rhythm (fewer clients in the summer months, before Christmas, or at the beginning of the school year, which were tough in terms of financial issues). The observations performed at various times allowed me to notice different strategies undertaken by the female workers towards clients.

While considering the definition of the observer's role in the membership categories, I carried out the research from the position of a peripheral member of

the group (Adler, Adler 1994). It is characterized by the fact that the researcher observes the people, enters into close interactions with them, but does not take part in the activities that constitute the core of group membership. Therefore, I participated in the interactions between the agency workers, I observed how they behaved with clients, but I did not get involved in sex work myself. The people managing the escort agencies knew and agreed to the research, which was of an overt character for the agency workers, but covert for the clients of the venue (Hammersley, Atkinson 2000: 81, 270). Such a solution resulted from the specificity of the researched area and the negotiated access rules. From the very beginning of the research, I openly presented the research project to the people managing the escort agencies, to obtain their consent. Hence, I planned to carry out observations that would be overt to all members of the agency's world. However, according to the agency's manager, revealing to the clients that they were being observed could discourage them from visiting a given venue. It is worth noting that since the clients *in the lounge* behaved "naturally" during my observations, "the observer effect" (Hammersley, Atkinson 2000: 270; Angrosino 2010: 117) was related to the female workers. It was often the case (especially in the case of the women who had not yet managed to *get used to* my presence) that I noticed some signs of uneasiness caused by my seeing their strategies when dealing with clients under the influence of alcohol or those characterized by a very low bodily capital (cf. Chapter 4). This might have impacted the intensity of their actions and modified their behaviors towards the clients to some extent.

All observations were regularly written down after leaving the escort agency (Goode, Hatt 1965: 52; Patton 1997; Hammersley, Atkinson 2000: 196; Angrosino 2010: 87). I treated the textual materials obtained in this manner as being equal to the data from the interviews, and I employed the same analytical procedures in those cases.

1.3.2.2. Interviews with sex workers and other agency workers

Apart from the observations, an important source of data was provided by the unstructured interviews that I carried out with all categories of people who worked in the escort agencies (women providing sex services, security workers, the cleaning lady, the bartender, the owners) and clients.¹⁷ They were performed from May 2007 to November 2013.

¹⁷ More detailed characteristics of the interviewees are presented in the *Annex*. What is worth noting is the fact that almost all the researched females were Polish. This reflects the low level of differentiation in terms of nationality (but also in other categories) among sex workers in Lodz. This situation looks a little different in other large cities of Poland (e.g. Warsaw) which have more interesting labor markets for sex workers visiting Poland (mainly coming from the East and South of Europe).

The following people were chosen for the project from the group of women providing sex services by adopting the theoretical sampling procedure:

1. Women at various stages of their involvement in the provision of sex services, including:
 - beginners (first days in the agency) and those with longer experience (from several months to a dozen or so years), as well as women that had left prostitution,
 - women providing sex services continuously or those returning (often multiple times) to that activity after attempting to leave prostitution;
2. Those who worked in a single venue or who changed it many times;
3. Those who worked on night or day shifts;
4. Those who were involved in various types of sex business, organized in various ways (indoor and outdoor prostitution, but also lap dancing, striptease, erotic webcams);
5. Those who worked in venues in the researched city, in other cities in the country, and abroad;
6. Those who started providing sex services at different ages (from 17 to more than 50 years old);
7. Those with different family situations (single people, those in (in)formal relationships, with or without children, those who stayed or did not stay in touch with their parents, etc.) and professional situations (those who had worked previously or at the time of the research in *a normal job* or those who did not have such experiences).

Such a selection of interviewees allowed me to make some comparisons between cases that were both similar and significantly different in numerous terms, e.g., in the scope of the work strategy adopted by the research women, the manner of shaping the relationships in the group of coworkers, and with the remaining categories of social actors in the agency's world, as well as the specificity of their involvement in prostitution.

Eventually, I carried out unstructured interviews with 56 women. I met many of them several times, during interviews and observations. These meetings provided an opportunity to ask about details and to notice changes in the women's life situations and the level of their involvement in prostitution.

Additional information was provided by interviews with the remaining categories of workers in the researched escort agencies: owners, security workers, and the cleaning lady (14 interviews). They allowed me to saturate the categories related to the working conditions in the venues and the specificity of relationships between the workers. It is worth stressing that it was usually easier to obtain consent for those interviews than in the case of women providing sex services. An exception here was the *owners*, who were extremely reluctant to agree to the interviews. As a result, I carried out the interviews only with six managers of the agencies. Despite my attempts, I did not succeed in differentiating this group of participants further.

For comparative purposes, I also carried out seven interviews with clients who used (on a more or less regular basis) the services provided by the escort agencies. I found my interviewees on the basis of the snowball sampling method. However, they were not selected from the clients of the researched venues, as the managers did not give their consent. These interviews contributed to the saturation of the categories related to the specificity of relationships in the female worker-client dyads, at various stages of the client's visit to the venues.

The average duration of an interview with women providing sex services was about 90 minutes (from 35 to 290 minutes), 65 minutes with clients (from 40 to 135 minutes), and about 55 minutes with other workers (from 30 to 75 minutes).

While carrying out the interviews, I tried to ask questions in such a way as to encourage the interviewees to present longer statements, allowing them to demonstrate how they see and define the agency's reality (Rubin, Rubin 1987; Hammersley, Atkinson 2000: 133; Kvale 2004: 13; Charmaz 2006: 33). Hence, the possibility to modify the set of guidelines for the interview along with the evolution of the project and the emergence of other categories was of crucial significance (Rubin, Rubin 1997: 201–205; Babbie 2004: 327–328). Furthermore, it was highly important to adjust the manner of asking questions to particular participants and the circumstances of the interview (Hammersley, Atkinson 2000: 157). Lots of information was provided by spontaneous statements that were not answers to the researcher's questions (Hammersley, Atkinson 2000: 133). Therefore, during the interviews, I was sensitized to significant threads introduced by the researched person, and I tried to encourage them to develop those topics. Similarly, I devoted much attention to the non-verbal aspects of the interaction, pointing to the emotional conditions of the participants at subsequent stages of the interview. It was especially significant in the case of conversations with the women providing sex services, each of whom perceived the interview in a different and personal manner. For some of them, it was a difficult situation, while for others it was quite the opposite.

I carried out the interviews mainly within the escort agencies, in a separate room, behind closed doors, face to face. The female interviewees preferred such a situation, as they preferred to talk during breaks between clients than to meet additionally before or after work. Taking into account the arrangement of the research, the interviews took place in an area that was known and familiar to the women providing sex services. I was a guest in their world. Thus, they could feel a certain degree of control over the course of the interaction. This had a positive impact on their readiness to talk and limited the asymmetry of roles that is connected with an interview situation. How the research was conducted also had additional advantages. All the social actors involved in the operation of escort agencies know the role they play in the venue. The risk that it would be hard to talk about experiences related to the provision of sex services through fear of being discredited was minimal. On the other hand, such an arrangement meant the need

to wait for an interview sometimes for several hours if a particular woman was busy. Moreover, it also happened quite often that the interview was suspended if a client entered the venue and it resumed when the conditions allowed. During the intensified *traffic* of clients, it was also hard to find a calm place for the interview to be conducted.

Regarding the fact that I was introduced to the venues by an acquaintance of the agency's manager, the interviewees might have had some doubts at the beginning, suspecting that I might communicate the information to third parties. To test this theory, some of them performed a kind of loyalty tests on me. Those tests consisted in, e.g., talking about behaviors related to breaking the rules of the venue, with the reservation "but don't tell the boss," and later observing if I really kept such information to myself. However, the frequency of such doubts decreased the longer I was in a given agency.

1.3.3. Ethical issues

An integral element of empirical studies is provided by deliberations on the ethical issues related to the research problem, the institutional surroundings that the research takes place in, the procedures employed in the project, and its participants (Frankford-Nachmias, Nachmias 2001: 90; Kvale 2004: 117, c.f. Shaver 2005; Surmiak 2010). Ethical codes and the literature of the subject prove to be helpful when planning your own research. However, they are more a set of guidelines than rules to be strictly followed while conducting the research. Therefore, they sensitize the researcher to situations that might be encountered in the field, but final decisions on how to deal with them, and the responsibility for such decisions, are still assigned to the researcher.

The key matter stressed in the literature of the subject is obtaining informed consent for participation in the research (Frankford-Nachmias, Nachmias 2001: 95). A participant should be informed about the general purpose of the research, potential risks (as well as the stress and the potential changes in self-perception) and the advantages that can be brought by participating in the project. They should also be aware of their right to refuse to answer a question and withdraw from the research at any given moment (Kvale 2004: 118–119). I attempted to follow these recommendations in my project. Nevertheless, I am aware that the consent given by the agencies' managers to my presence somehow forced the participants to accept me "hanging around" the venue. However, being able to observe particular behaviors from particular female workers depended on the results of my negotiations with the interested parties themselves. Similarly, consent to being interviewed also had to be agreed with them.

By obtaining consent for an interview or observation, a researcher accepts responsibility for guaranteeing the participants' confidentiality (Frankford-Nach-

mias, Nachmias 2001: 100). It is especially important when (as in the case of my project) the collected information may discredit the participants and have some negative consequences for their private lives. The interviewees often expressed concern regarding third parties' access to the collected data. In response to their expectations, I decided to transcribe all interviews on my own, according to the recommendations of B. Poland (2002). I also took care so the text files did not include any information that could help to identify the interviewees (cf. Kvale 2004: 121). It was my priority not to make their participation in the project a source of problems. A similar principle regards the presentation of the data about the researched venues. This also results from arrangements with the people who managed the agencies. They expected loyalty (cf. Ciesielska et al. 2012: 43) and the promise that all issues that might be of interest to enforcement bodies would remain confidential¹⁸ in exchange for their help (cf. Sanders 2006: 455).

In the case of qualitative research, the value of the obtained material depends to a large extent on the researcher's skills in establishing a relationship with the participants that would be based on trust, contributing to the achievement of intimate familiarity (Blumer 1969; cf. Kleinknecht 2007: 282; Ślęzak 2018a). This is hard to achieve in the case of interactions with people who experience the consequences of the stigma arising from prostitution on an everyday basis. They might also be afraid that the researcher would also perceive them in a stereotypical manner (Ślęzak 2013b). An indicator of those concerns was given by the symptoms of shame that I observed at the first stage of the interviews (Ślęzak 2013b). While gathering data in the agency, I often felt that I was being observed by the female interviewees (cf. Patton 1997), that my gestures and responses were being analyzed, that I was being tested to identify what I "really" thought. Hence, an odd reaction, even if non-verbal, can jeopardize all previous efforts related to entering the agency and makes it impossible to carry out saturated interviews. I may also "spoil the field" and make it difficult for other researchers to conduct similar projects in the future (Hammersley, Atkinson 2000: 280). The situation of meeting a normal and a discredited person (Goffman 1963) is highly difficult in interactional terms, and it requires increased efforts from both sides of the interaction (cf. Ślęzak 2013b: 149–162). Aware of that fact, I tried to show to the participants that my purpose was to understand their work and life, not to judge them. These actions contributed to establishing an understanding, which allowed me to perform successful interviews.

Achieving intimate familiarity is also supported by all the actions undertaken by the researcher that contribute to decreasing the asymmetry between them and the interviewees. It is crucial to treat them subjectively and like a partner. This is

¹⁸ During the research, I did not witness any incidents (e.g. related to the use of violence) that would require intervention from the police, but stories about such situations (in the form of reports of experiences from other agencies or the experiences of friends) appeared in the interviews.

shown in, among others, how a researcher responds to the (actually understandable) interest of the interviewees in the researcher as a person, his/her work, or private life (Sanders 2006: 462). During the interviews and observations, the interviewees often asked about my work at the university, but also about, e.g., my emotional life or the reasons for my interest in escort agencies. They often saw me as a person of a similar life situation, young, with a relatively weak position on the labor market. Although this helped in establishing closer relationships, it was also related to particular challenges, e.g., setting a boundary for revealing information about myself, but also other people in my life.

The described actions, even though they helped me to collect complete and in-depth data, may also contribute to a change in the definition of the situation, from it being an interview to a meeting of therapeutic purposes (Dickson-Swift et al. 2007: 336; Konecki 2000: 173). While collecting the empirical data, I observed that some interviewees treated the meeting with me as a rudimentary psychotherapy visit (maybe not understanding the difference fully). During the interviews, they presented some meta-reflections of who they are and how their lives developed. They also made spontaneous declarations that they “arranged” things thanks to the interview, that they had taken a different look at their choices. In this situation, the participants assessed the interview positively, through the prism of the emotional advantages that it brought (cf. Patton 1997: 191). However, the balance between the search for knowledge and the preservation of ethical requirements is very fragile (Kvale 2004: 131). The intimacy of relationships during an interview may be so “seductive” that it causes the interviewees to reveal very personal information that they might regret later (Dickson-Swift et al. 2007: 339; Kvale 2004: 123). Ramos called this process “opening up Pandora’s box” (Dickson-Swift et al. 2007: 338). Its consequences are hard to be predicted, and the interview may become a painful experience for both parties involved, although the intensity of those emotions is obviously different (Melrose 2002: 346). This process (to some extent) also took place in the project that I carried out. As a result of introspection, the participants were confronted with aspects of their personalities which they had not noticed or which they denied on an everyday basis. During the interviews, then woman often raised very hard topics, reminding themselves of painful experiences (rapes, violence, loneliness, psychological problems, addiction) and going through them once again. In numerous cases, telling such stories was cathartic (I was often the first person they were told to). I attempted to strengthen this effect with my behavior during and after the interview, based on elaborated “normalizing” actions. However, when I got home, I started thinking about the participants’ welfare, in particular about how they deal with memories of incidents that they recalled or became aware of in the retrospection (cf. Babbie 2004: 517; Kaźmierska 2004). A sociologist does not carry out therapeutic interviews or crisis interventions; however, I felt it in some cases that my interviewees would need such a kind of help. On the other hand, I also needed to deal with

negative emotions which appeared while the life stories of the interviewees were told (cf. Lofland et al. 2009: 55). Drastic stories about harm can cause a kind of shock, despite the fact that, theoretically, the researcher was prepared for them. As a result, he/she may feel sad, angry, guilty, frustrated or helpless (Dickson-Swift et al. 2007: 329; Melrose 2002: 347; Lofland et al. 2009: 54). In my case, these emotions frequently appeared during the research. Furthermore, I often felt powerless, resulting from passively observing and analyzing the experiences of women caught up in complex life situations. At the same time, I could not provide them with any particular help.

My experiences can be embedded in a broader problem related to emotions during field research. Regardless of how researchers respond to stressful situations in the field, they usually are not adequately prepared to deal with the participants' and their own emotions (Melrose 2002: 345). Numerous researchers of phenomena related to prostitution admit that with the high intensity of work and conducting intensive interviews, they start to adopt the respondents' feelings. At the same time, they are afraid that if they show their emotions, they will be perceived as unprofessional and incompetent (Melrose 2002: 345).

It seems that ideas connected to a researcher's emotions are insufficiently described in the methodological literature, which may arise from the positivist vision of practicing the science. In the case of ethnographic research, the researcher is often advised to try to play the role of a marginal native, who avoids the danger of becoming too intimate with the participants (Hammersley, Atkinson 2000: 120). However, it needs to be kept in mind that emotions pose an indispensable part of each participant observation (Konecki 2000: 152). It is often stressed that self-observation of the researcher's emotional state can serve as a useful analytical tool (cf. Konecki 2000: 155). However, there are relatively few instructions on how a researcher might deal with the feeling of guilt or emotional exhaustion. Researchers (including me) often lean on informal networks of support from family members or friends. However, this is not an advantageous solution for many reasons. Research conducted by a team of interdisciplinary experts seems more effective. Apart from the strictly scientific purposes, they could also carry out some practical interventions. Being actively involved in the work for the benefit of the participants may provide a way to deal with the feelings that one is abusing them (Dec, Szumigraj 2004; Bernstein 2007: 196; Dickson-Swift et al. 2007: 340).

Chapter 2

MANAGING AN ESCORT AGENCY

2.1. THE ORGANIZATIONAL FRAMEWORK

The shape of the *work situation* of women in escort agencies is influenced by how a given venue is run, and this is established by the people managing it. These conditions provide a framework for the relationships between particular social actors of the agency's world, i.e., the owner (or owners), the manager (managers), the security worker (security workers), the bartender (bartenders), the cleaning lady, the women providing sex services, the telephonists¹ who arrange meetings with clients, as well as the potential clients themselves.

The venue's manager is of key importance in determining the working conditions. There are several categories of such people that can be differentiated from the researched agencies. The first category includes people who started running such venues in the period of the flourishing market (in the 1990s or at the beginning of the 21st century), and have carried it out since then, but not necessarily in the same places or forms. Another group consists of second-generation managers, usually sons of the people who had run the agencies and who then handed the family business to their offspring. The third group is comprised of sex workers, security workers or bartenders who, while leaning on the capital and experience gathered during their work in the agency, decided to open their own venue. Based on the collected data, I can draw a conclusion that in order to run an escort agency, the period of "apprenticeship" and gaining some experience as an agency worker or partner is highly significant. The specificity of the relationships, conditions, and contents of the work is so different in this case that without previous familiarization it would be difficult to manage such a venue effectively, and it would bring a lot of problems (both inside the organization as well as when dealing with

¹ Escort agencies are different in terms of size, which impacts the shape of their organizational structure. In larger venues, the categories of hired workers have a clearly defined set of duties. The smaller the venue, the larger the probability of various roles being combined within the scope of a single "position." For example, bartenders or the women providing sex services may also be the telephonist; alcohol may be sold by security workers, etc. In the case of small agencies, the use of a cleaning service is also limited, and some of the responsibilities related to keeping the place clean fall to the sex workers.

the external environment).² However, it must be stressed that the person who manages a venue is not always the agency owner. Entrusting another person with management responsibilities may result from the complex structure of the venue, e.g., hiring several dozen female workers and occupying several buildings in different parts of the city. Also, those who derive gains from the agency but do not want to be associated with it decide not to manage the venue directly.³ In such situations, the agency is managed by a trusted person (an experienced coworker or partner), while the actual owner (owners) remains in the shadows. Their personal details are not revealed to the workers, they do not visit the venue, but they still control how the agency operates. In the case of my research, the workers were very often not sure whether the person who manages their work is the owner or just a representative. It was also usually the case that no one explained the situation to anybody. Regardless of whether a given venue was managed by the owner or a representative, the other workers called this person *boss*, and approached him in such a way. This is the term that I use in my publication.

The tasks of *the boss* include, mostly, determining the operational principles of the venue (also in terms of providing security for the female workers), “human resources management,” deciding on the prices, recording turnover, collecting money for the services (but here they can be replaced by security workers or bartenders – depending on the structure in a given venue) and the payment of remuneration. The suggested set of tasks overlaps with the duties of supervisors in other types of organizations (cf. Armstrong 2005: 271), but many differences can be noticed how it is realized. They become especially visible in the actions undertaken by *the bosses* towards the women providing sex services. Although I use such terms as “female workers” and “employed,” these relationships can be perceived as unregistered work. It is understandable that it is impossible to legally employ people for the provision of sex services in Poland. Therefore, the women providing sex services in the agencies are deprived of the basic rights stipulated in the Labor Code and other regulations of labor law and social insurance (Pater 2007: 4). Furthermore, there are no personal taxes paid for the income from unregistered work (Kostrubiec 1999). However, it needs to be stressed that each venue registered as a business enterprise has several women that are legally employed, usually as bartenders, cleaning ladies, masseurs, hostesses, dancers, etc. Of course, this does not reflect the actual scope of responsibilities, and it is just a cover allowing them to sign an employment contract. Despite the advantages that even partial registration can bring a female worker, the interviewees were not especially interested in such a form of work. The contract meant that they would become bound to a given agency, which was not always seen as an advantageous

² An example here would be the agencies that did not manage to stay on the market.

³ This also refers to people involved in organized criminal groups.

solution. The women attached much more value to the flexible character of their work and the possibility to change venue quickly (if there were ever such a need). Factors that discouraged them from entering into contracts also included high costs (taxes and social security contributions), which decreased the actual income of the female workers, as well as being afraid of losing social benefits or starting debt enforcement proceedings in the case of taking up a registered job (cf. Pater 2007: 26). Striving to keep the fact they provide sex services in secrecy, the majority of the interviewees did not want to be formally employed in a company that is an escort agency and which could be recognized as such by others. They also tried to avoid the need to provide *the boss* with their real personal data, as they were afraid of how it would be stored and used. Hence, the majority of women did not care about an employment contract. Also, the people managing the agencies preferred to limit the number of registered female workers, considering the high costs of labor and the significant fluctuations in personnel. Therefore, *the bosses* offered contracts to those women who had worked in their agencies for a longer time, thanks to which both sides had time to start trusting each other. However, in the case of many researched venues, new female workers did not need to show their ID or sign any written obligations related to their work in the agency. This manner of “employment” has its consequences for organizing work in the agency.

2.2. STRATEGIES FOR SELECTING FEMALE WORKERS FOR ESCORT AGENCIES

The recruitment and selection of female workers is the key matter for the person who runs an escort agency. In the face of new forms of prostitution, easier organization of sex work on one’s own (thanks to Internet sites with sex ads) and the growing number of venues, this stage is related to an increasing number of difficulties. During the period of the research, the local market of sex services was a seller’s market, where there was a continuous search for new people. This resulted in the need for *permanent recruitment*. Its purpose was mainly to complement the team of female workers, and secondly, to get a competitive advantage over other venues.

The fluctuation of female workers is a problem especially in the case of smaller venues, but it can sometimes hinder the running of larger clubs as well. The reason for this is that the female workers often change agencies, usually not warning *the boss* of their decision beforehand. As a consequence, both the composition of the personnel and the number of workers remain unstable and unpredictable. Therefore, *permanent recruitment* is a way to counteract any deficiencies in the team. Employing potential “excess” female workers allows *the boss* to develop a safety “buffer” in case some of them are absent or leave the agency in the future.

However, it is not an easy task to determine the number of women that should work in the agency so that both *the boss* and the women themselves could benefit from the situation. My interviewees assumed that the greater *the traffic*, i.e., the clients' interest, the higher the number of female workers needed in a given agency; at the same time, the higher the number of female workers that the clients can choose from, the higher *the traffic* in the venue. Eventually, *the boss* decides on an ongoing basis the number of women that should work in the venue at a given time (considering both the demand for services and seasonal factors, e.g., the season, Christmas time, etc.). While making the decision, *the boss* refers to his experience and intuition, as well as an objective criterion, i.e., the number of rooms in a given venue used for meetings with clients. From the perspective of *the boss*, the number of female workers should allow him to use all the rooms at the same time, and leave some women ready in case other clients come in, triggering the need for interactions in *the lounge*. Therefore, employing a higher number of female workers was not seen as a problem. In some venues, and in some periods, there were even a dozen or twenty women working on one shift. This was reflected in the potentially higher income of the agency, as more women worked for the benefit of the agency (not necessarily increasing their own gains).

In turn, the group of female workers expressed two remarkably different opinions on this notion. According to the first one, the fewer women who work in a venue, the better, because the probability that each one will be chosen by a client is greater. What is more, a man coming into the agency alone will not be overawed:

There's no rule here, it's not good when our number is not enough because it's not enough, and it's not good either when it is too high, because it's too high. I think it would be ok if there were eight girls. When there are 12 girls, we don't even have a place to sit in the lounge, and it's ok when five men come at a time, it's so-so when there are two clients, but it's too many when there's only one man. [R23]

This opinion was often represented by female workers with relatively short work experience, with an attitude of rivalry towards their coworkers.

According to the second approach, the more women work in the agency, the better, as men prefer venues where they can choose from a wider selection. It also makes it easier for the female workers to develop a *fun atmosphere*, which is especially important for clients coming in groups. Aware of this fact, the female workers often overstated the number of women available in the agency during their phone conversations with potential clients, trying to encourage them to come to the venue:

If there are more girls, the traffic is greater and there are more clients, because they have something to choose from [laughter]. It's not ok if there are only two girls. But he will choose one if there are ten women. Sometimes, when they call, they ask how

many girls there are, so we always tell them there are more [laughter], so they come, and when they come and there are fewer girls, it's too bad; there are five men and they took them [laughter], but they may like one of the ones there, and they might go with her. [R33]

This opinion was presented mostly by the female workers with greater seniority in the agency, greater experience, and with a more cooperative attitude towards the coworkers:

The doors are really open here, because the girls come in, they get hired and leave. It's obvious that some girls would like to see very few of us and a lot of clients. There are girls who would want only four or five of us to work, with let's say fifteen clients, so these fifteen hours are taken only by four or five girls. But on the other hand, you know, if there are eight or nine of us, and the selection is greater, the guys are more into it, they come more often if there are more girls. [R1]

However, employing too many girls in the venue can cause some problems. First of all, it causes frustrations resulting from excessive fragmentation of income (many clients choose many female workers, so they do not earn significant amounts), and there are also interpersonal problems related to the intensified rivalry (cf. Chapter 4). The female workers feel that they are wasting their time in a given venue and leave in search of a better place. Therefore, there is a core of "permanent" female workers (i.e. those that have worked for several weeks/months) that can be distinguished in the structure of the venues and a number of women who are involved only temporarily, for a shorter or longer time. There are numerous candidates who undertake work in the agency only to check out the conditions of work, payments, the atmosphere, and the level of client interest. During the observations performed over several days, they collect information which allows them to make a decision on staying there longer or carrying on with their search. Therefore, recruitment can be unsuccessful even if it seems that *the boss* has found a new female worker.

Another goal of the *permanent recruitment* of female workers is to obtain a competitive advantage over other agencies. According to the belief of the people managing the venues, the clients get bored with even the most popular set of female workers after some time, and they seek new experiences in the competing agencies. Hence, it is essential to *continuously refresh the team and extend it* with new people. Each female worker, especially one that suits the clients' fantasies best, according to *the boss*, is a valuable enrichment for the venue's offer. It is worth mentioning in this context that *the bosses* of the researched agencies employed two strategies while selecting new female workers:

- an egalitarian one, which consists in employing all the women who applied to the agency and expressed their willingness to work. The selection took place during the course of her work – if a given woman did not cope in the venue (she

had a small number of clients, she got involved in conflicts with other workers), she resigned after some time or was fired. A feature of this strategy was the silent assumption that there would be a trial period for a new female worker.

– an elite one, which means that only those women who met the criteria set by the managers were employed in the agency. The impression made by a given woman (or the impression she could make after “investing” in her) was evaluated, i.e., first of all her age, look, unique beauty,⁴ physique, communication competence, demeanor, potential addictions, diseases, but sometimes also experience⁵ in working in the agency and the provision of specific sex services. Adoption of the elite strategy arises from the assumption that the venue should *maintain a standard* and employ only particular female workers. A woman who does not fit the agency’s image will not earn, but she can also exert a negative influence on the clients’ opinions about the venue. An analogical evaluation is adopted not only in the case of women in the recruitment process, but also those already working in the venue, who, if they no longer match the applicable pattern, are fired.

When selecting female workers, *the boss* tries to achieve the “human capital advantage” over other similar venues operating in a given city (cf. Armstrong 2005: 325). Therefore, the basis for operating the agency is to obtain *key female workers* who attract clients, who play the role of an *attraction of the venue*:

It’s obvious that when there’s one nice ass, and she stands out in the lounge, and there are six of us but she’s the nicest, it’s obvious that she will be chosen. But others earn too. But there must be a bait like this, because later it’s like: “come on to [place X – note by I.Š.], as there are one or two nice asses, and the others are not too bad.” And then they come. [R51]

While carrying out the egalitarian strategy, *the bosses* of the researched venues employed two tactics for selecting female workers, regarding the assumed level of team *differentiation*. The first consisted in selecting women with similar features (mostly age and look) thanks to which the agency had a specialty, a specific profile, attractive for a certain type of client. It was one of the elements that create *the venue’s prestige*,⁶ allowing it to stand out when compared to others, and

⁴ When it comes to the researched venues, special value was ascribed to women from South America or Africa, who do not work in local agencies very often. A deeper explanation of the popularity of women from those parts of the world in the European sex business can be found in the publication by Agustin (2007).

⁵ For numerous *bosses*, a candidate’s lack of experience in prostitution is an advantage, as they believe that she has not acquired *bad habits* yet, she has not been *spoiled by the agencies* (*in vivo* code). However, on the other hand, she can cause trouble when dealing with clients. Therefore, *the bosses* usually prefer women with a certain level of experience and a “professional” approach.

⁶ It should be noted that the female workers themselves also attempted to maintain the *venue’s prestige*, contributing to the dismissal of those women who, according to them, did not fit the agency and who could discourage the clients (cf. Chapter 3).

embed it in the clients' awareness as the best place to spend time if they are looking for a certain type of sex worker:

Our boss had three places, and there were only young girls in one of them, because he grouped it in such a way, one place with young girls, one with women such as us, we said mature about forty years old, and two 50, 53 years old. But one of them did not smoke, she had smooth skin, a tan, neat, she looked so nice that no one would say she was that age, maybe 45 [laughter]. And the third place, I've never been there, but I think that they only had older ladies [R30].

The second strategy consisted in selecting various women who complemented each other in terms of appearance, so each potential guest of the venue could find a female worker to suit him:

If all the girls were like, let's say, grandmas, no girl would catch their eye. And there's also this bad reputation: "no, don't go there, there are only old women." There MUST be mixed girls, both young and old. And stouter, and fatter, it's better this way. [R51]

Therefore, the differentiation of female workers may contribute to the increase in *the traffic* within the venue, but on the other hand, it can also lead to a situation when clients prefer only some of them, while the others do not earn. In the case of such a team structure, strong rivalry can be observed. The socialization and adaptation process of a new female worker is harder (cf. Chapter 3).

To sum up, it may be noticed the actions undertaken by *the bosses* in the context of selecting and choosing female workers are based on the irremovable tension between the need to stabilize the team (to not allow a situation to arise when there is an insufficient number of female workers in the venue) and at the same time to ensure changes in its composition (because changeability is embedded in the specificity of sex services). As a result, the goal, which is to achieve the *optimum composition of the team* as regards the number and characteristics of women, is continuously chased but never achieved.

2.3. RECRUITMENT OF FEMALE SEX WORKERS FOR ESCORT AGENCIES

The bosses of agencies seek new workers almost continuously, using various manners to reach women that could be interested in sex work.

When it comes to the researched escort agencies, the absolute majority of new female workers were women who had changed venue in search of more favorable working conditions. Therefore, "taking over" female workers from other agencies was an everyday practice, although not usually initiated by *the bosses*. In this case, the informal networks of contacts and the grapevine between women working in

various venues were of key importance. In the case of women without any experience in prostitution, or who were returning to this way of earning money after years of break or who had come from another city, a source of information about the venues were mostly the press and web ads, published on dedicated websites. These advertisements were available *non-stop*, which is important as numerous women who think about their involvement in sex work do not decide to contact the agency immediately – they need some time to think it through.

It is worth stressing that both in the advertisements and during face to face conversations, *the bosses* used such terms as workdays, working hours, commission for the worker, professional working conditions, advertisements, and promotion of the club and workers. This is how they framed prostitution as a job. This partially results from the necessity (regarding legal circumstances) to use masking language (especially in advertisements). However, on the other hand, through the proper selection of words, *the bosses* tried to invalidate the social stigma attached to prostitution, which transformed it from being a “vice” into a “job,” in their words. This was intended to dispel any doubts of women hesitating whether to start working in the agency. At the same time, the content of the advertisements and the managers’ direct conversations with the candidate were intended to build the belief that the agency could provide working conditions that she would not be able to obtain in any other profession available to her: the possibility to adjust the working hours to her needs and the high (although this is a relative notion) earnings. In the case of women with professional experience from the low-paid service sector or who were outside of the labor market, this could be an appealing offer.

The first contact of a potential female worker and *the boss* usually was in the form of a phone conversation, less often of an exchange of e-mails. However, both parties of the interaction aimed for the fastest possible personal meeting in the agency. *The job interview* that took place there, although usually not very long, mostly concerned the working condition in a given venue, was it also a chance to collect some important information. From the perspective of *the boss*, a meeting is necessary to be able to estimate the erotic capital⁷ of the candidate, her social com-

⁷ The term that I use is inspired by the *erotic capital* concept by Green and Hakim. It is a form of social value resulting from an individual’s sexual attractiveness (mainly the physical appearance) to the majority of members of her social group, and which elicits an erotic response in others (Green 2008a). Like other forms of capital, erotic capital is exchangeable and can allow a person to obtain both social and economic capital (Green 2008b, Hakim 2010). Hakim (2010), while proposing a broader understanding of erotic capital, believes that it is a multidimensional combination of physical and social attractiveness, which goes beyond the sexual attractiveness itself. Therefore, it is related not only to sexuality and a beautiful body, but also to social attractiveness (grace, charm, social skills, flirtatiousness, the ability to make people like or desire you), liveliness, social presentation (style of dress, perfume, jewelry, hairstyles, etc.) (Hakim 2010: 501). “Erotic capital is thus a combination of aesthetic, visual, physical, social, and sexual attractiveness to other members of your society, and especially to members of the opposite sex, in all social contexts” (Hakim 2010: 501).

petencies, and motivation, as well as to evaluate whether and to what extent she will match the organization in terms of the assumed team structure (cf. Armstrong 2005: 368). Furthermore, during the conversation, the potential female worker's *career in sex work is reconstructed by the boss*, to check which venues she has already worked in, and, based on that, to anticipate how she might cope. It is an opportunity for the female worker to see the club and, considering the behavior of *the boss* and female coworkers, estimate whether working there would be advantageous for her. The meeting is also an opportunity to determine the principles of cooperation and to negotiate them in the field of crucial importance for both sides of the interactions. The most important issues raised during those conversations include:

a) specifying the female worker's *range of duties*. Since there are no employment contracts where the female workers' actual tasks would be stipulated, the conditions of cooperation are agreed on within the course of individual and informal negotiations. Observance of arrangements is regulated by the principle of mutuality (cf. Pater 2007: 35). Although *the scope of responsibilities* held by the female workers can be slightly different when it comes to the venue size and scale of operations, it mostly covers encouraging the clients to spend as much money in the agency as possible, through:

– the provision of sex services during the meeting *in the room*. A client can pay for a given time, usually an hour or multiple hours. In the case of the lower-class venues, the client can also pay for half an hour or quarters. Some venues allow so-called *trips* to the clients, who might be staying at a hotel or – less frequently – to private flats;

– additional actions offered to the client (e.g. striptease, lap dance, pole dance, massage) included in the meeting price (as an element of club promotion) or as an additionally paid service;

– encouraging the clients to buy alcohol (and/or other drugs);

– any possible organizational works (which regarding a venue can include e.g., the need to answer the phone, prepare drinks, or even clean the rooms).

b) discussing the general working principles⁸ which were very similar in all of the researched venues. The most important one is *exclusivity*, consisting in the fact that as long a woman works in one agency, she is allowed to meet clients only through that agency. Meetings in the client's apartment or at a hotel without *the boss* knowing about it are treated as a violation of the principles, and a financial penalty is imposed or (in the case of gross violation) the female worker is *dismissed*.

c) discussing the rules regarding *health care*. Each researched venue had its own policy in that field. It covered both the monitoring of the female workers'

⁸ More detailed norms are communicated within the group of coworkers, without the participation of *the boss*; cf. Chapter 3.

health conditions as well as rules of safe sex during meetings with the clients. *The bosses* presented a whole spectrum of behaviors in this scope: from requiring (under the threat of *dismissal*) regular provisions of medical test results, or even the organization of specific periodical examinations carried out by a doctor who cooperates with the venue, to a total lack of interest in this issue (according to the assumptions that it is the female worker herself who should take care of her health). A similar differentiation in attitudes can be observed in the case of safe sex rules. In some venues, a condom was seen as an obligatory element of each instance of sexual intercourse with a client, while in others, the primary value was to meet his expectations, even if it meant having sex without any protection.

d) discussing the principles related to taking psychoactive substances within the premises, with clients and coworkers. Since this is a stage where the female workers are usually forbidden or discouraged from taking them, the women familiarize themselves with the actual rules applicable in the venue over the course of their work. Seldom are the rules in the form of prohibition, rather acquiescence, encouragement, or even forcing the women to take such kind of substances and/or offering them to clients (Ślęzak 2012).

e) determining working hours for the new female workers. The researched venues operated in shifts: during the day (from 10.00–12.00 to 20.00–21.00) and/or at night (from about 20.00 to 6.00, or until the last client leaves). If the agency is open 24/7, the female worker can choose the shift she prefers. In the case of my interviewees, the night shift was selected mostly by those women who did not hide the fact they work in an agency from their relatives, who did not stay in touch with them, and/or those who, apart from sex work, also has *a normal job* or who raised children. Thanks to working at night, they could devote the day to other activities:

I prefer working at night. I used to work in an apartment during the daytime, but it's tiring, because I had no contact with my kids. I prepared the kids for school, went to work at ten in the morning, and I came back about ten at night, when the kids were already asleep. What about dinner? Washing? And if I start doing something at eleven at night, I pull an all-nighter, and I need to get up in the morning at six, seven, depending on what time my daughter goes to school. [R26]

Work *during the day* was selected more often by women who hid the fact they provide sex services from their relatives. They tried to adjust the hours spent in the agency to the rhythm of the work that they supposedly went to (e.g. as salespeople, childminders) so their relatives could not find out the truth. This was possible as, although the agencies operated permanent hours, each female worker could arrange their own working time with *the boss* individually. Therefore, it happened relatively often that the women working on one shift started and ended her work at different times from each other.

In the case of female workers with longer experience in the agency, the choice of the shift was also related to their seeing a difference in working condition, e.g., intensity of control by *the boss* or security workers, *the atmosphere* among the coworkers, the estimated size of profits. Hence, evaluating which shift is “the better one” depends on the individual preferences of the female workers and her perception of advantages and disadvantages of each solution:

There are sober clients during the day, coming while they are at work, they do it quickly, keep you for an hour and then they need to get back to work, because they just left for a moment. And at night, they go out and get wasted, come here wiped out, and they sit in the lounge for let’s say about an hour. [...] It’s real drudgery with those guys, so it’s better to work during the day. [R3]

It might seem better at night when it comes to traffic and earnings. The weekend, for example, on Saturday, when everyone leaves the clubs, you can earn good money from one at night till six in the morning. The guests come with money, cash. [R5]

During her conversation with *the boss*, the female worker can also determine the days when she will come to the agency: selected workdays, only weekends or every day, all week (workdays and weekends, with a certain specific number of free days).

f) negotiations related to where the female workers live. The absolute majority of the women treated the agency as a workplace that you leave when the shift is finished. However, for some of them, the agency was a temporary or permanent place of residence. Such a *work mode* was chosen by those women for whom the prostitution was an interim way of dealing with a difficult family and economic situation (e.g. escaping from home, from an aggressive partner, breaking off contacts with relatives, lack of her own place). Also, the women who treated prostitution as a planned, time-limited labor migration to another city chose to live in the agency. It allowed them to save on the rental of a room, because they stayed in the venue either for free or with a charge deducted from their earnings. However, for some female workers, living in the agency often became a long-term strategy for dealing with homelessness (cf. Lech 2007). In smaller agencies, one of the rooms devoted to meetings with clients served as a bedroom, where a female worker had her own cabinet for her things. In the case of larger venues, there were specific rooms intended for that purpose, to be used only by those women. However, in numerous cases, the living conditions were rather harsh, and the female workers could not count on a moment of privacy or isolation. While living in the venue, they actually remained *at the disposal of the clients* all the time, especially if the other female workers had not yet come to the agency or have already left. In this way, they had more meetings than if they worked only in the determined hours, and then left the agency. This led to a distortion and shortening of the rest time, especially if the room where the female worker lived was also

used by other workers for meetings with clients. This *work mode* also contributed to the advancing isolation from the external environment and limitation of their private life. During my research, I observed women who almost did not leave the agency at all, devoting all their time to dealing with the clients. As such a situation was advantageous for *the bosses* for financial reasons, they were not interested in determining the rest time for their female workers; on the contrary, they pushed to limit it to the minimum. In turn, determination of the time for work and rest by the female worker was extremely difficult in a situation when it was the number of meetings with clients that decided whether she had a place to live. All of this meant that this *work mode* was related to a great mental and physical burden, as well as strong interdependence from *the boss*. It is worth noticing that similar processes take place, e.g., in the work of a housekeeper, when a woman lives with the family she works for (Rosińska-Kordasiewicz 2005: 6). Therefore, it may be concluded that the potential to objectify women remains in the structural conditions of those relationships.

g) discussing remuneration principles for the female workers, applicable in a given agency. They are a factor that allows an agency to stand out, as the rates, how the money is distributed among the woman, and possibilities to earn additional money may encourage a woman to take up work there, even if other conditions are discouraging.

Like in other companies, the hourly rate per meeting was determined by *the bosses* on the basis of comparing the price lists of competing agencies⁹ (cf. Armstrong 2005: 586). The price determined in reference to other venues reflects their hierarchy, influencing the choices made by the clients. Two extreme strategies can be differentiated in this scope. The first one is *attracting with low prices for meetings* that many clients can afford. Additionally, they are also offered a possibility to purchase shorter and less expensive half-hour and fifteen-minute meetings. This strategy was undertaken by the agencies that could not stand out with their interior design, equipment, or the team of female workers, so they encouraged the clients mostly through their prices. It usually ensures significant interest from the clients, but they do not leave large amounts of money in those agencies. They usually do not buy any alcohol, and they cannot afford to pay for additional services or to give tips to the female workers. The opposite strategy is to use *premium pricing*, prices so high that only wealthy clients can afford the visit. This results in lower *traffic* in the venue, but it can be more than compensated for by the high amounts that the clients leave in the agency, spending there an hour, multiple hours or the whole night. However, they often require a suitably prepared space, more luxurious interior design, a series of additional services, and selected female workers.

⁹ When determining the price list, *the bosses* usually take care to maintain the local *status quo*, and not to lower the prices too much. The offers of women working for themselves are also considered here, which regarding the low rates, are a negative point of reference.

As a result, a female worker in such a venue can welcome fewer clients (therefore involving in less work) to earn the same (or a higher) amount than her colleague in an agency of a lower prestige:

There can be fewer clients here; I had more in that place. That was more like piecework. Here we've got fewer clients but the earnings are the same, the same. You will earn the same even while servicing fewer clients. [R9]

The differentiation of prices in particular venues results from the fact that the charge for a one-hour meeting may include slightly different services. When paying a basic rate in one agency, a client has the possibility to have sexual intercourse once, but in another place it will be twice, and in yet another place, he will additionally be offered, e.g., a striptease. Hence, a simple comparison of prices "per hour" does not reflect what a client might expect or what the female worker is obliged to do.

Remuneration of the female workers is strictly connected with the number of meetings they have with clients. This system may be called a payment-by-results scheme, similar to piecework (cf. Armstrong 2005: 631). However, in contrast to the majority of piecework systems, agencies usually do not ensure any guaranteed rates of minimum payment, and workers are also not paid for periods when there are no clients. As the remuneration of the female workers depends not only on their motivation to work but also on clients' interest in a given venue, it is hard to predict in practice how much will be paid. The payment made by the client is divided between the agency's *boss* and the female worker, although the proportions of this division may differ a lot, which is one of the key factors attracting or discouraging women from working in a given venue. In a situation when an agency is not very popular, or when it is starting operations, the managers can introduce a flat rate, regardless of the number of meetings with the clients. It is so low that even when *the traffic* is small, it is profitable for the women to incur it to be able to use the venue's infrastructure. As the popularity increases, *the bosses* usually employ the "fifty-fifty" principle, i.e., 50% of the payment made by the client goes to the venue's owner, and the other half to the female worker. In some cases, these proportions may be, e.g., 60% to 40%, 70% to 30%. The rate of payment charged by the agency allows the women to understand how profitable the running of an efficient venue can be. Although the income is also spent on costs related to maintaining the venue (heating, electricity, security, the purchase of cleaning agents and potential investments), the absolute majority is the profit of the owner. This situation is usually accepted by the female workers as an inevitable cost of working in the venue:

It is fifty-fifty with the boss, because the boss also must have something, this is why he runs it. No surprise that he doesn't want to have a loss-making business. Electric-

ity, water, every girl washes herself, every girl uses everything, so plenty of it is used when you're here. So, he MUST also have something. [R48]

However, it should be stressed that in some venues, the managers require additional payment (so-called "agency charges," e.g., for cleaning agents, the cost of advertisements on a website).

One principle when the female workers deal with clients is to collect money for the meeting in advance, alone in the room is best, without any witnesses to the transaction. This is related to the need to keep up the artifice that the agencies are merely mediators in establishing contact between two parties, while the money is an arrangement between the parties for an interaction that involved no one else.

Tips and gifts from clients, as well as additional payments, constitute a significant part of the female worker's earnings. The clients must make such a payment if they expect *non-standard sex services* that exceed the scope included in the basic rate (the so-called *standard rate*). The whole amount is collected by the female workers in the majority of the agencies. Furthermore, in some venues, the women got an agreed amount from the sale of alcohol, other drinks, cigarettes or sweets, which they encouraged the client to purchase during his visit (see more in Chapters 4 and 5).

h) at the *job interview* stage, *the boss* informs the female workers about the *client meeting recording system* adopted in the venue, which is the basis for the financial settlements. In the researched agencies, everything was written down in a notebook or binder. It included information about which female worker was working, when, for how long, in which room she entertained the client, as well as the sum he paid for the time. The lists prepared in such a way form the basis for payments and control of the duration of meetings with clients. After the client has already selected the female worker and paid the agreed amount, she (or another designated worker) enters the data into the notebook. Furthermore, the female worker hands over the money, which is later deposited by *the boss* (or the designated worker) and paid out according to the system employed. From the venues' owners perspective, a weakness of this method is the need to rely on the agency's workers. The venue's profit depends on whether they enter the real amount, or whether they record the meeting at all. This encourages suspicion and distrust from the venues' owners towards the people in charge of the agency's financial issues.

Some smaller venues as well as those where the majority of female workers work illegally avoid using a banking system, so they do not leave any trace of the transactions, which is typical of entities that operate within the informal sector (cf. Pater 2007). In such places, everything is done with cash. However, it should be stressed that it is more likely that larger venues will accept credit card payments; there will be a possibility to issue a receipt or an invoice, and to introduce a cashless payment of remuneration for the workers.

The researched agencies used cash to settle up with the female workers. The system encountered most often was payment of the earned money¹⁰ right after the shift finished (meaning at the end of each workday). This is a system that many women prefer, as it allows them to get the money very quickly, which is crucial if financial problems were the main reason for getting involved in prostitution. On the other hand, managing money adequately and saving it to be able to pay higher bills, for example, or to create a *financial cushion* (e.g. in the case of a disease or when the time comes for a woman to leave prostitution) is hard with such a system of remuneration. It requires that the female workers be financially disciplined, which is usually difficult for them. This system contributes to them spending money quickly, since it is highly probable that the female worker will receive payment for other meetings with clients the next day. During the research, many women could not determine specifically their monthly earnings because they did not control how much they earn and spend every day. Therefore, this system strengthens involvement in sex work, as it is the condition that helps them maintain financial liquidity. Paradoxically, despite working continuously, the general financial situation of a female worker is not much better than before she took up the work. From the perspective of *bosses*, such a system allows them to settle up with the female workers quickly, it does not require them to store money on-site or in banks, and it allows them to avoid being accused of depressing earnings or making erroneous settlements, which happens when payments are made with longer intervals. However, this system may also contribute to the female workers' absence. This is especially true after successful meetings – they do not go to the agency the following day because they have no financial motivation. A higher frequency of remuneration payments increases the risk that a female worker will leave the venue without any notice if the conditions are no longer suitable for her. Hence, this system provides the female workers with a certain level of independence, allowing them to remain mobile within the labor market.

Another solution is to pay out the remuneration for a given shift at the beginning of the next shift. This is intended to maintain the flow of payments while at the same time forcing the female worker to come to the venue, even if she is not strongly motivated. Despite that, if a woman decides to leave work without prior notice, it means that she will lose the earnings from the previous workday:

It's like a form of security, that when a girl has earned some money, then she must come to work. Otherwise, if she fucks things up, or leaves work without any explanation, or goes somewhere, or she simply doesn't turn up, the boss keeps the money for herself. And it's always a little weird to say to your boss: "I'm leaving, I don't want to work here anymore." [R33]

¹⁰ As I have already mentioned, it does not pertain to tips, gifts and charges for additional sex services outside the *standard*. Money earned in this manner is not recorded, and are immediately at the female worker's disposal.

Some venues adopted a system of deferred payment of earned money (e.g. once a week, once every two weeks). This practice stabilizes the team of workers as it forces them to come to the venue at least until the remuneration is received. It also contributes to a more rational spending of the earned money. However, it leaves a margin for abuse on the side of *the boss*. The amounts earned are different every day, and they should be augmented by additional sums, e.g., for the alcohol that the client bought. Thus, the reliable calculation of remuneration depends on the honesty of the person responsible for recording and adding the extra amounts. If a woman often worked under the influence of alcohol and she did not correctly register the amounts she earned, she could become an easy target for *the boss* to appropriate a part of her earnings.

Finally, it should be stressed that when determining the conditions of employment, only selected topics, the most important ones from the perspective of each party, were discussed. The more detailed arrangements that might significantly modify the everyday working practice in the agency were avoided.¹¹ At the same time, all issues that were not arranged properly may be used against the workers in the future, e.g., by *the boss* “reminding” himself of additional charges or penalties. Gross violation of the applicable rules by the female workers is related to *dismissal* from work. Obviously, they cannot count on any severance pay or period of notice; on the contrary, they often received financial penalties for actual or supposed losses or damage.

2.3.1. Additional actions by *the bosses*

If a candidate does not have any previous experience in prostitution, or if her erotic capital is especially valuable for *the boss*, *the recruitment process* is complemented by additional actions that are intended to encourage her to work in a given venue. They are based on two strategies: *composure work*, and *formulating an interesting offer*.¹²

Composure work, i.e., trying to instill a feeling of calmness about the situation, is performed by *the bosses* even as early as during the telephone conversations that precede a potential female worker’s visit to the venue. This happens especially when she does not have any experience in prostitution or is changing the agency because of *oppressive relationships* in the previous place. This work consists in anticipating and dispelling any doubts and anxieties that can discourage a potential female worker. The communicated information is not always real, but it should help to achieve the planned result, i.e., promote trust, calm

¹¹ This especially refers to *novice* female workers, who do not ask *the boss* too many questions about the working conditions, because they simply do not know what to ask about.

¹² This category was inspired by the concept by Strauss et al. (1985).

a given woman down and encourage her to undertake the work in the agency. If the woman has a possibility to verify the information by asking current workers, or if she knows the venue's reputation, she can see through such tricks (and make strategic use of them for her own gain). If not, she usually takes *the boss'* words at face value.

The most important thread of *the composure work* is usually the security. Therefore, *the boss* usually stresses the effectiveness of the security system in the venue, the professionalism of the security staff, the multi-stage client selection system, and the possibility of refusing to interact with a client if he does not suit the female worker. An element of the *composure work* is also comparing of the venue's offer with the competition in terms of finances and image (cf. Armstrong 2005: 366). This is accompanied by stressing the dangers related to working in other agencies and in other forms of prostitution (e.g. on one's own). A given venue is presented as a *reliable workplace*, while *the boss* as a reliable entrepreneur who treats his female workers subjectively, because he understands both their situation and needs. An especially effective technique of the *composure work* is the polite and kind interest from *the boss* during the first, difficult period of adapting to the provision of sex services:

When I came here, the boss talked to me very kindly. He was delighted that a person who has a degree had come here to work. [...] He welcomed me VERY nicely. And I just simply didn't feel like looking anymore, calling anywhere, because the stress of going into such a place for the first time is the greatest I think. [R1]

The harder was the situation of the female worker, the more she needed, but also appreciated any kind gestures from *the boss* (e.g. words from one of *the bosses* to a woman who wanted to live in the agency: "This room is at your disposal, such an apartment for you"). Despite the fact that it was only the determination to earn a profit that lay behind such kindness, this strategy allowed the female worker to limit the stress she was experiencing. Such behavior might help a woman decide whether she should stay in the venue (cf. Konecki 2007: 17).

In the case of women who had some experience working in similar agencies (and who were also familiar with the conditions they offer), and also the women who, regarding their erotic capital, were especially valuable to the venue, apart from the *composure work*, the *bosses* also tried to *formulate an interesting offer*. That offer was intended to encourage the potential female workers to start and continue to work in this particular place. The more *the boss* cared about a given female worker, the more he was ready to offer her, so he would *formulate an offer* that would be potentially more interesting than the proposal from other venues. Female workers who are aware of this mechanism enter into the game, trying to negotiate the most advantageous working conditions possible. If they do not obtain them, they seek better possibilities in another agency.

A “golden hello” (cf. Armstrong 2005: 395) in a venue usually included various financial facilities, e.g., paying for travel to the agency (even from another city), preparing and paying for web advertisements on a website devoted to clients who are looking for sex services, as well as *crediting*, i.e., providing loans that the female worker would work off. Sometimes, getting into the *crediting* relationship was the only way a female worker could obtain financial resources. Therefore, the women starting to work expected and asked for the loans, secured with their future profits:

If you need any financial help, it's there. When I came here I could only afford a one-way ticket, and I simply got the money from the boss, and of course I will give it back. I needed money for everyday shopping, for cigarettes. I live here for free. [R14]

The women used the funds obtained in such a manner for ongoing expenditures, bills, but also drugs and “investments in themselves” (e.g. purchasing lingerie for work, visits to tanning salons). In the case of some venues, those types of “investments” were co-funded by *the boss* to some extent. It was obviously related only to those women who were promising, and it indicated that the invested resources would pay for themselves thanks to her popularity (thus the venue's popularity) among the clients:

And this friend said this to me: “you know what, if you go there [to the venue he operates – note by I.Š.], you would look amazing, thin, nice, if you had long hair, it would be great.” And I say: “right, but it costs.” And he says: “I'll just give you part of the money and you can spend it on your hair.” [R15]

From the perspective of *the boss*, lending money is less risky if a female worker lives in the venue. In such a situation, she remains under his control, usually works more intensively, and pays off the debt quicker. In the remaining cases, such actions are related to a certain level of risk, as a new female worker might take the money and disappear. However, it is true that if she does not want to lose the opportunity to go back to the venue in the future, she will pay off the debt. This system, if it operates in the described manner, provides an alternative to high-interest rate non-bank loans and pawnshops, when a given female worker cannot count on credit from a bank. However, this is not always a safe solution. In the case of venues of an *oppressive style of management*, entering into a *crediting relationship* makes the woman dependent on a given agency, as her debt becomes impossible to pay off: along with paying off the borrowed money, *the boss* adds new costs to the amount, forcing her to stay in the venue (cf. subchapter 2.4.1).

The “golden hello” may also include concessions in the scope of working hours and days. This is important because the grounds for getting involved in prostitution include not only financial needs, but also the search for flexible work-

ing conditions (Jeffrey, MacDonald 2006: 321). The combination of those two elements is impossible in occupations that the women worked in previously or were prepared for. Employment in various positions in shops, service points, on an assembly line, etc. was usually related to low income and long working hours, as well as abuse of the supervisor's power (in the form of violence, intimidation, or sexual harassment) (cf. Jeffrey, MacDonald 2006: 322). If *the boss* could give the impression that he could provide the female worker with totally different conditions, it was highly probable that she would start working in a given agency.

During *the job interview* and the first days in the venue, *the boss* focuses on developing the type of relationships with the female worker that would encourage her to get involved in work and would be reflected in a higher income, and, at the same time, greater profits for the venue. Although these actions can seem like the establishment of subjective relationships, only during her work (as a result of observing the behavior and decisions of *the boss*) can the female worker discover his real attitude to his employees. The claims made by *the boss* are usually verified very quickly, but the more *the boss* cares about the new female worker, the longer he is able to maintain his *composure actions* towards her. A change in the behavior of *the boss* towards a given female worker initiates the process of *deconstructing the composure work*:

You know, after some time he got so mean that you couldn't get along with him. He drank, got stoned, you know, he would go to one of the rooms to sleep [...] And later he simply blew it, he just blew it. And I don't know what happened later because I left. But the situation changed for a moment during those two weeks. He was so calm, as good as gold, and then he changed into an attacker, so demanding! Those penalties you know, for everything. [R35]

A reason for this change in behavior of *the boss* may be the artificial character of the *composure work*. The promises made to the female workers are a great burden, hard to realize on an everyday basis, especially since *the boss* usually does not feel obliged (often he does not even plan) to actually keep them. Violation of the agreed principles may also be a result of a change in the external or internal circumstances of the organization (e.g. the level of client interest in the venue, the number of female workers, the financial condition of the agency, *the boss* becoming an addict, etc.) that force changes in the initially negotiated working conditions. However, from *the boss*' perspective, undertaking some *composure work* is advantageous even if a female worker leaves the agency shortly after *deconstruction*. First of all, while working in the venue (even for a couple of days), she generates profits. Secondly, there is always a chance that she will stay for longer. It should be noted that, during the *job interview*, the female workers are also not necessarily honest when talking about themselves, and they can make declarations that they do not plan to keep. It is especially frequent in the case of experienced

female workers, who changed the agencies numerous times and know the strategies adopted by *the bosses*. Therefore, *the job interview* is a game between *the boss* and the female worker, where both parties are ready to present themselves as being more involved in future interactions than they actually plan to be.

2.4. MANAGEMENT STYLES

Based on my research, I can conclude that regardless of how *the bosses* of the researched agencies presented themselves to the candidates during the *job interviews*, they were full of prejudices towards the women in their everyday interactions. Paradoxically (in the light of how they earned their living), they adopted an attitude of taking the moral high ground towards them. They saw the women according to the “prostitute stereotype,” as people who avoid work and who are at the same time ready to lie, cheat, and steal. As a result, they did not trust their female workers, and they introduced strict supervision and control over their work (which is typical of an authoritarian leadership; Lewin, White, Lippit 1939) and a system of penalties. There was a varied intensity of the described attitude within the researched agencies, which resulted from, among other things, various definitions of the operated enterprises adopted by *the bosses*. Their visions can be ordered on a continuum, from the belief that the agency is a form of a business enterprise in the services or entertainment sector, which should be operated with consideration of rights attributable to the female workers¹³ (regardless of the fact that this is unregistered work), to the view that the agencies belong to the “underworld,” and they should be governed by the logics of an illegal vice, where only the principles determined and followed by *the boss* are applicable. Therefore, a closer look at the organization of the venues where the researched women worked shows significant differences in the scope of carrying out the negotiated working conditions. Based on the data collected during the research, I reconstructed four styles of management in escort agencies that can be placed on a continuum from authoritarian-objectifying to democratic-autonomizing.

2.4.1. *Oppressive management style*

The bosses representing the oppressive style of agency management operate according to the principle: everything that helps to maximize the profit is allowed. Even if their venue has the status of a registered business enterprise, they

¹³ Assuming that deriving benefits from sex services does not break the rights of women involved in prostitution.

do not see it as a workplace where sex workers have not only the duties but also rights. On the contrary, female workers are treated in an objectifying manner. An authoritarian *boss* changes the cooperation principles freely, regardless of any previous arrangements. Hence, the asymmetry of power is very high and reflected in a series of actions that can be interpreted in the categories of intimidation, psychological, physical (including sexual) and economic abuse. At the same time, *the boss* feels unpunished as he is aware that female workers rarely report crimes committed in the agency where they work to the police. This is mostly due to their concerns about the consequences of such a step for their personal lives (the risk of revealing that they provide sexual services) and further involvement in prostitution,¹⁴ but also the anticipated shame experienced in relation to a possible investigation and court trial:

You see, you will go the police, report it and you will have a lawsuit, and now what? You'll be dragged through the courts with a pimp? You'll be scared that your family is there, because a call may be sent from the court. You know, maybe they'll write that you have been called as a witness or something, but you know, you say nothing to nobody and then you have this court case out of nowhere. Besides, when you work in an agency, the owner knows where you live. And now you're trying to sue him, he's a piece of shit that will come and cause troubles at your home. Or among your neighbors. And he's young, he's got young friends, also junkies. You'll have problems in your neighbourhood. So, if you have any problems with that psycho, it's better to deal with it, to leave work, than to make a fuss. [...] It's better this way than to drag it through the courts, because you know, he'll be dragging me through the courts, and it's shameful to admit it in front of these courts and talk about such intimate details, it's not pleasant at all. To publicly reveal what you do. You know, it usually happens quietly, you simply don't go to work the next day, and that's it. [R23]

The way in which *the bosses* perceive the female workers is crucial for the emergence of oppressive relationships. The image of a “prostitute” that they develop is simplified, stereotypical, and affected negatively, despite how much direct contact they have with various women who provide sex services. Having an attitude of both intellectual and moral superiority is also typical of this management style, including direct expressions of contempt towards the female workers. Incidents of psychological abuse are frequent, in particular, humiliating and ridiculing the women. This is how *the bosses* stress (but also recreate) the distance between them, making it impossible to establish subjective relationships:¹⁵

¹⁴ The similar concerns are also present in the case of other unregistered jobs (Pater 2007: 24).

¹⁵ Analogical phenomena may be observed in the world of housekeeping (Rosińska-Kordasiewicz 2005: 44).

By the way, the boss called us names, which I didn't like at all: "you morons, you idiots, you morons with no education," and I said to myself: "please, I graduated from a school that would knock your socks off." But I stayed quiet. I said to myself: "ok, I'm a moron with no education, I'm an idiot, but you still ride on my cunt" [with anger]. Yeah, this finished me off the most. [R21]

This boss caused this unpleasant atmosphere. A girl had nice clothes, nice make-up on, she looked nice, and she [*the boss* – note by I.Š.] says: "look how fat your legs are, the cellulite, what are doing here at all?? Are you here to earn money??" That's the kind of atmosphere she created. [R43]

Psychological abuse is often accompanied by physical abuse towards the female workers, who are perceived by *the boss* as defenseless and financially dependent on him:

There is a boss who is an alcoholic, and when he drinks too much, he beats the girls, because he unloads his aggression on these girls. He has two favorites, and the rest are treated very badly. [R53]

Besides, he touches the girls too. He beat the girls, but this time someone showed some compassion and called the police. You know, he would hit them with a cabinet, push them on the bed, or, you know (pause). [R23]

In the case of venues of an *oppressive management style*, the sexual harassment of women is also encountered frequently. It comes in the form of "trial" sexual intercourse that a new female worker must have with *the boss* before she starts working. It is often the case that also later, during work, if *the boss* wants it, the woman must have sexual intercourse with him. Obviously, it is not related to any charges from him, as this is a "privilege of *the boss*" and the "cost" of the female worker. Therefore, sexual relations are in this case an element of the dependence ritual and in some way degrade the female workers:

I thought she [about *the boss* of the venue – note by I.Š.] was an idiot, because she was great to the girls at first, she helped if one of them didn't have clothes, and bought something, but later she used to beat and reprimand them. And this live in lover of hers, he was also great to the girls at the beginning, but he also poked the ones she liked, when the boss was not there. She found out later, so he and the boss beat the girls. [R51]

The bosses who adopt this management style do not interfere in the relationships between the female workers, allowing conflicts to arise. Furthermore, they often contribute to the escalation of those conflicts through their behavior. As such, in much the same way there might be intimidation in other types of organization (cf. Chomczyński 2008), the erosion of social networks also takes place here. The ob-

jective treatment of female workers becomes apparent through interference in their private lives. It is especially visible in the case of women who live in the agency. However, other female workers are also an object of interest for *the bosses*. The information on their personal lives can be used against them in the future to exert an influence and make them work more intensively (e.g. you have a little child, a loan, etc. – you need to work), and in some cases even to blackmail them. Threats, blackmailing, and violence are elements of the strategy adopted in this management style, with the intention of keeping the female workers in the venue:

There was this boss, the owner, she ran it with her son. And she yelled at me once, and I started crying right away. The girls calmed me down, but I said no, she is weird, and I got pissed off and said: “you know what, I’m leaving.” And this son pushes me on the bed and says, “just you fucking try to pack!!!” I just looked at him, and he was going to beat the shit out of me. And I said to him: “if you beat me, I can’t work anyway.” And later I ran, when he wasn’t there. [R18]

To minimize the risk of a female worker leaving the venue, *the bosses* also try to make the women dependent on them in numerous dimensions (not only financially). This affects mostly (but not only) those women for whom the agency is also a place of residence. Potentially, each female worker can become financially dependent on *the boss* through the *loan and debt* mechanism. As a result of adding new costs, penalties for various misbehaviors (being late for work, leaving earlier, impolite conduct towards a client, etc.), but also *the boss’s* cheating and stealing from the workers, the debt increases continuously, until it becomes impossible to be paid off. In the case of the venues of the *oppressive management style*, the penalties are imposed randomly, and the female workers are not sure whether a particular behavior will be punished or not, because *the boss* responds unpredictably (e.g. whether he is sober or not). The size of the penalties changes as well, from being equal to an hourly rate for a meeting with the client, to a whole week’s earnings:

The boss took the money from us, it was said that the money is paid every day, but he didn’t give everything, he kept some [...]. This is why I didn’t want to work in that place, because although you could earn some money there, it’s not ok to cheat the girls. [R15]

When he took the money from me, I had nothing left. So, everything I earned. I never had money to buy a cigarette or something. [...] he didn’t ask if you had condoms or not, if you have the money to buy this or that. [R21]

The financial dependence is often accompanied by addiction to psychoactive substances. In the case of the *oppressive agencies*, *the boss* encourages or allows the female workers to use various kinds of substances (“for courage”, “for a good

start to the shift”), which are easily available within the venue. After some time, the women realize they cannot leave because the agency is the only place where they can earn money for the drugs and buy them without any problems. This is how *the boss* gets a female worker to stay in the venue, regardless of his actions, until he stops needing her.

Oppressive bosses are not interested in their workers’ security or health condition. This is reflected in the lack of investment in security, acceptance of all clients, regardless of their behavior in the agency (cf. Chapter 6), and the type of services they expect (e.g. sex without protection, hardcore sex). In the case of a conflict between a worker and a client, seldom do *the bosses* stand by their workers. They are usually ready to burden them with a penalty for having an unsuccessful meeting. Furthermore, these venues are also often underfunded (but it is not a principle), which results from the fact that the only criterion *the bosses* adopt when evaluating their operation is the profit they want to achieve by abusing the female workers and minimizing the financial outlays. They assume that the clients who come to the agency are only looking to fulfill their sexual needs; thus, the interior design, the equipment in the venue, or even maintaining cleanliness are not a priority:

Even back then it was not great. Clients wiped their bodies with the same towels, one after the other. The washing was done once a week, and in the meantime, it just dried. You couldn’t be sure that the bed sheets were washed. The girls, you know, took their towels and bed sheets home and washed them. At least, they took the towels. [R23]

Adopting the *oppressive management style* often indicates that the agency has entered the final stage of its operation (however, it can go on for numerous months). *The bosses* who manage the venue in such a manner usually use or are addicted to psychoactive substances, sex, or gambling on their own. Since they are unable to fulfill their financial needs, they introduce sudden changes in working conditions and the way they treat the female workers. All of this discourages the women from working in a given venue:

I worked there for a very short time, two weeks, two and a half. When I went there, the boss was very nice, but you know, after a few days he started showing his temper. He started to take money for cleaning, for detergents, there were penalties for being late, so I said, ok, thank you, this is not a deal I am willing to make. Despite me working, you know, because it’s clear he’d get some money from that, we shared it with him, he still took additional money from us for this and for that, for us being late, come on, he earned more from this than us. And he did nothing, he only got stoned [outraged]. [R35]

All the mentioned elements mean that agencies of *the oppressive management style* offer difficult working conditions, and the women who work there fall into three broad categories. The first category is women who are not familiar with

the local market and who are not aware of any alternative work there. Above all, this refers to foreigners – Poles in Western Europe, or women who work in Poland but who come from the eastern states. They often do not have legal matters settled connected with their stay, and they do not know the reality, the law or the language of the country they find themselves in, so they feel dependent on *the boss* of the agency, who uses it to his advantage. Such venues also attract women who are well-oriented in the local market of sex services. This happens when they realize that, considering their situation (e.g. addictions, difficulty finding a job in other agencies), they can only work in a place like that (“There was a moment in that place when just the alcoholics and drug addicts remained” [R23]). The final category is women who are familiar with the local market and who select a given agency because of, e.g., high *traffic* or small competition from coworkers. However, this is a highly risky strategy, as working in such a venue long term is connected with enormous mental and emotional costs:

It was tough to settle in with the girls, because I was different, and there was some pathology, for sure! In my opinion. They were always drunk, and I used it, because a client will not take a drunk girl, so she could sleep while he paid, right? Sleep for an hour. Or he can impale her without a condom, but it's her concern, right? And, you know, I looked at it only from the financial perspective; you can drink, do what you want! [R3]

Girls come and go there, and the traffic is quite ok, because it's by an expressway, but what's the point when he does not respect those girls? They just run away. [R53]

The presented features characteristic of the *oppressive management style* can be interpreted by adopting the perspective of intimidation and sexual violence in the workplace. From this point of view, it can be seen as a specific way of managing and instructing the workers, strengthened by the specific values of the organizational culture (cf. Chomczyński 2008: 87). Hirigoyen stresses that violence in the workplace is related to the dominating-dominated relationship, where the first one tries not only to subordinate the other, but also to cause them to lose their own identity (Hirigoyen 2003: 21). The violent and oppressive actions observed in agencies are also conditioned structurally. They are based on a clear asymmetry between the positions of *the bosses* and their female workers, who find themselves in a situation of highly limited (at least according to them) possibilities of finding a job, financially dependent on the agency's manager, and the feeling of being someone worse. People of a lower status and a weaker position are more likely to become victims of violence in the workplace (Salin 2003: 1219). Similar interactional conditions may be found in other contexts, e.g., the housekeeping work of immigrants (cf. Rosińska-Kordasiewicz 2005). Within the environment of the escort agencies, the actions which degrade and objectify the female workers may cause a permanent reduction in their self-esteem and, as a consequence, make it more difficult for them to find another way of earning money.

2.4.2. A style based on *excessive fraternization*

In contrast to the previous management style, in the case of relationships based on *excessive fraternization*, *the boss* does not present an authoritarian attitude. There is more of a laissez-faire leadership style (Lewin, Lippit, White 1939), thus masking his lack of skills in managing the workers. Like the previous style, *the boss* does not treat the escort agency as a workplace where he is obliged to follow certain rules. However, in this case, it is a result more of his not finding an equilibrium between the strive to maximize the profit and making use of the charms related to managing a venue that offers the fulfillment of sexual needs. As a result, *the boss* treats the agency as a place of free sex, the unpunished use of drugs, fun *and* earning money.

I remember when a colleague had a birthday once, he [*the boss* – note by I.Š.] brought a bottle of vodka, a party to the max. We closed one room, music, if a client came, the second room was free. And the girls said that when there were parties in the past, he [*the boss* – note by I.Š.] closed the doors right away, turned off the entry phone and that was it. When you have fun, make it worthwhile. The boss was so cheerful, nice. [R30]

A characteristic feature of these types of venues is the omnipresence of psychoactive substances. Alcohol, drugs and designer drugs are treated as an “addition to sex” (Špila 2006: 79). Hence, *the boss* not only allows but also encourages the female workers to use them. He also often makes it easier to obtain those substances and takes part in using them:

Everyone knew that officially, you know, it was just a drinking party and drug-taking all the time. [R21]

Hence, *the boss fraternizes* with female workers in various dimensions, shortening the distance and blurring the lines between the roles of supervisor, lover or colleague. Such behavior can weaken his position in the venue. Often, a way to strengthen it is to force sexual intercourse, or to make the female workers lose face (Goffman 2006: 10–11), e.g., by criticizing their sexual skills (cf. Konecki 2007: 76). It is interesting that due to *the boss's* weak position, the female workers stand up to it successfully, using the same strategy, and leading *the boss* to lose face. Therefore, the sexual relationship may express the domination of *the boss* and the attempts of the female workers to achieve a greater symmetry in roles and positions:

I heard he tested all the girls who were there; he slept with every girl, excluding me. [...] And I heard he was really horrible in bed [laughter], this is what the girls told me [laughter]. And he used to come and say some bullshit that you know: “you were

this and that,” and in the end, the girls started to needle him that he can’t get it up when needed, such statements, why not? “You must blow up a doll all the time because you have some troubles with your erection.” Something like that. [R40]

The relationships between the female workers in the venues of this management style were based either on principles of harsh rivalry for favors of *the boss* (that allowed a woman to take a high position in the organizational hierarchy; cf. Chapter 3) or having fun together. *The bosses* did not interfere in the course of those relationships, even if open conflicts emerged. Therefore, they allowed such situations to escalate:

To put it shortly, what happened is [sighs] that I fell in love with the boss, and since he was appealing, more girls were in love with him, so the situation was not very appealing. The boss was cool, but he also liked the girls, so one was jealous of the other, and this, among other reasons, is why the club failed. [R33]

The bosses involved in a management style based on *fraternization* did not often perpetrate physical or mental abuse (excluding sexual abuse) towards the female workers. It was more often the female workers (rivals in the continuously competing organizational hierarchy), who employed various ways of getting rid of their competition. With a weak position of *the boss*, it was often the female worker who was closest to him who had a major impact on what rules were applicable in the venue, forcing solutions that were advantageous to her. As a result, work principles in such venues are unequal, changeable, or different for particular female workers, depending on how close they can get to *the boss*.

The described style of management emerged mostly in two situations. The first situation is when *the boss* was a young person with little experience in agency management. He could not establish a proper distance and abused his position, e.g., by romancing the female workers. Secondly, despite his wealth of experience, *the boss* lost control of the venue as a result of becoming an addict. Hence, *excessive fraternization* relationships can be interpreted as an indicator of deepening problems in the running of the agency. In some venues, they preceded the *oppressive relationships* that *the boss* utilized to try to regain control of the female workers and force them to undertake more intensive work.

It was the young women who preferred the style based on *excessive fraternization*, who had just started to provide sex services, and who were all right with this *light*, fun atmosphere. The slightly older female workers also dealt well with it, knowing how to use their previous experience to influence how work was organized in the venue, and to adjust it to their expectations. However, in the long term, work in such places was related to threats, mostly to do with becoming addicted to psychoactive substances. The decision to leave a venue usually resulted from conflicts with coworkers or disappointment regarding closer relationships with *the boss*.

2.4.3. A style based on *distanced professionalism*

The bosses who present a management style based on *distanced professionalism* saw the agencies in business categories, as organizations generating sizable profits, the operation of which, however, brings many problems. One of them is the unprofessional behavior of the women providing sex services, exposing the agencies to financial and image losses. In order to minimize them, *the bosses* determined a series of work principles in the venue as well as a system of control and sanctions. The introduced principles were related mostly to work time and course of the interactions with clients. Like a *normal* workplace, the female workers should come to the agency according to an agreed schedule (which allowed *the bosses* to plan the number of women that would welcome clients on a given day). They should not be late or leave early, but also not take any psychoactive substances (in amounts that would hinder their work), or engage in arguments with co-workers or clients. Observance of those principles would allow *the bosses* to stabilize the process of venue management, like in other business organizations:

When you don't come to work you need to actually explain yourself here, it's not that I can make something up because I don't feel like coming to work. The boss is like, he treats it like a normal job, so when you're sick, he event wants a certificate that you visited a doctor. So, it's not possible that I simply won't come to work. [R5]

It actually was a good place when it comes to earnings. But there's also some kind of strictness, the bosses are a little fucked in their heads. They treat it like we, you know, go there and we're supposed to clock in [...] you simply have your own schedule [...]. We had Sundays off there. And like in a normal job, you had a right to holiday leave. Or, for example, you couldn't eat at work. You came at eight in the evening, and there's no food anymore, so it's not like the clients go and it stinks like a canteen. You could just eat a sandwich, and he would still tell you that it was for our own good, that he's taking care of our shape, and that we don't need to spend money. When we went down from the locker rooms to the lounge, we needed to stay there for the whole time, we couldn't go to the rooms like we can here. [R23]

The bosses imposed financial penalties for violation of the rules, the size of which was determined in informal work regulations and known to the female workers. They were not too high (they reached an amount equal to part of a rate for a one-hour meeting with a client). But they could be increased regarding the persistence of a given situation and potential losses that the agency suffered as a result of the female worker's actions. The purpose of those penalties was to discipline the female workers, for whom – according to *the bosses* – the only motivating factor was money. Even if the worker would rather not come to work, or get drunk while there, *because of her nature* she would not do that, just because of the financial penalty.

In contrast to the previously mentioned management styles, in this case, *the bosses* usually controlled the health condition of female workers. However, one should not look for the reasons for this behavior in their subjective approach to the employed women, but rather the calculation of potential profits and losses. Compulsory medical examinations (in some cases co-funded or organized by *the bosses*) are an investment in the agency's *reputation*, as is the quick removal of a female worker with health issues. The same principle was followed when *the bosses* invested in the security of the venue (cf. Chapter 6), thanks to which both the female workers and the clients could feel safe there.

In the described management style, *the bosses* developed and maintained a distance to the female workers, clearly stressing their places within the hierarchy. There is no place for *fraternization* or *oppressive* behaviors here. The management style based on *distanced professionalism* was introduced by *bosses* who run a legal business enterprise and who took care not to find themselves a subject of intense interest of the civil services. This style was also adopted by *bosses* whose goal was to develop a good *reputation* for the venue, to attract wealthier clients (who avoided agencies managed in an *oppressive* manner or *based on fraternization*) and women ready to work according to rules similar to those applicable in a *normal job*. To make the female workers accept some stricter principles and make them adapt to the discipline enforced in the agency, other elements of the *work situation* (e.g. the popularity of the venue among clients and the offered rates) should be so advantageous that they compensate for any inconveniences related to less flexible working conditions.

2.4.4. A style based on *kind professionalism*

The bosses involved in the management style based on *kind professionalism*, shared – to a great extent – the vision of *distanced professionalism*. However, they adopted slightly different ways of solving the problem of female workers who, according to them, were unwilling and lazy but necessary for the venue. The basis for their actions was the belief that regarding the specificity of the work and the situation of the female workers, they should be treated in a special manner: controlled, but not too intensively, introducing some firmness, but not excessively. One of the female workers put it in an interesting way during an interview:

You know, it's like you when you warn a child, but you don't yell. You don't demand too much because there's no point. If the bosses introduced some tougher regime, I'm afraid that the agency wouldn't be there in a few years. The girls would just drift away. [R22]

The belief that the detrimental effect of obeying excessive rules and a strict approach to the female workers can cause them to leave the venue was usually

because of the previous experience of *the bosses*. As a result, instead of financial penalties or violence, they were more inclined towards “soft” strategies, e.g., by determining such advantageous working conditions that it would make it unprofitable to break the rules and risk being *dismissed*. Introducing such solutions was intended to show that *the boss* is willing to treat his female workers honestly:

There are no penalties, because everything depends on the boss. When the boss is normal and he doesn't want to make quick money at the girls' expense, but he simply wants the girls to work, those penalties aren't needed. [R20]

Another element of this strategy is to determine favorable financial conditions, providing the female workers with the possibility to earn money on each activity offered to the clients by the venue. When they receive a commission from drinks, beverages, sweets bought by the clients, or their time spend *in the lounge*, etc., they are ready to be more involved in the work, and thus develop higher profits for the venue:

The girls get money for virtually everything, and you must know when you work in such a place it's not so easy. There's certain money for everything, and I think it's very reasonable. It's obvious that when a girl comes here, she wants to work and be happy with the financial conditions. [R15]

In the case of this management style, a way to discipline the female workers is to influence them through the development of the feeling that there is a personal obligation to follow the established principles. For example, it might be the opinion of *the boss* about a given female worker that is at stake here:

I came today because I don't want the boss to think that I'm insubordinate, or that when he says that I must come I won't and I'll make something up. [R31]

The effectiveness of this method is often based on the actual feeling of gratitude of the sex workers, e.g., for financial support provided in the form of *crediting*. However, it frequently results from monetary calculations, as violating the rules may lead to their losing their job, which is still highly advantageous in numerous respects when compared to other agencies. Following the principles determined by *the boss* is a result of the *principle of mutual concessions*, when *the boss* doesn't impose very strict ways of controlling and executing the rules, and the female workers should reciprocate by breaking the rules less often:

This is a business where you never know who will come to work one day and who won't. No sanctions are effective, no matter what the owners make up, for example, some financial penalties if you don't come without giving notice, like 1000 zlotys or something like that. When there's a penalty, if the worker doesn't want to pay this

1000 zlotys, she won't come at all! I don't set any penalties in my agency because I don't believe that they work. All you need to do is talk to the workers and push them a bit, this factor influences and somehow shapes them, forcing them to follow the rules. There's no other way. [W1]

In the style based on *kind professionalism*, the bosses were ready to undertake actions that were interpreted by the female workers as subjectifying them. However, in reality, these actions were often opportunistic. They were composed of, e.g., developing the feeling of significance in the female workers and the possibility of their influencing certain issues (e.g. minor upgrades of the venue), giving the impression that *the boss* is "on their side," with a kind attitude, the way of talking to them, etc. As my observations suggest, even very small gestures from the managers were appreciated by the female workers, which is understandable when compared to the oppressive or strongly objectifying actions undertaken by *the bosses* in other venues.

In contrast to the *oppressive* and *fraternization* styles, in this case, the roles of *the boss* and sex partner were clearly separated and differentiated. While striving for a stable team, *the bosses* ascribed great significance to the relationships between workers. Although they did not interfere on an everyday basis, leaving them to their own dynamics, their response was strong if interpersonal problems and conflicts between the female workers started to have a damaging impact on the atmosphere in the venue:

Actually, it's really calm around here, frankly speaking, when compared to other agencies, because I really was in some hardcore places that were impossible to bear. I just sat, cried, and I simply had enough of it. Here, it's ok, because we have this boss that can simply calm some people down. Those who are jealous or something. At least this is what I think for now. [pause] And some, in other agencies, it's like they don't give a shit if the girls fight or not. [R14]

Of course, the described actions undertaken by *the bosses* do not eliminate all behaviors of the female workers that have a negative impact on the organization. The running of an agency requires numerous concessions (e.g. allowing the women to use psychoactive substances in such doses that do not hinder their work). However, at least some of the female workers who accept such a management style try to follow the established principles to keep their job for longer. They create *the core of the team* and often deal with socializing new female workers in such a way that *the boss* would prefer.

The relationships of *kind professionalism* were usually established by *the bosses* who had many years of experience in running an agency and who had often tested other styles. Carrying out the described style is not easy, as the manager is required to have adequate skills to cope with various female workers, and to establish boundaries and a proper distance so that the relationships remain asymmetric. When adopting such a style failed, *the bosses* modified their behaviors, moving towards *distanced professionalism*.

2.4.5. Management styles – summary

Summing up, the four presented management styles can be perceived as a continuum of ways in which *the bosses* build relationships with their female workers. However, in the case of larger venues, the management style can differ in relation to particular female workers (e.g. regarding their place in the earning hierarchy – workers who are less popular among clients are treated by *the boss* in an *oppressive* manner, and those with higher earnings are treated more *democratically*). Furthermore, the situation gets more complicated when a given agency is managed by several people with divergent visions on how the relationships with female workers should be developed. A lack of a cohesive policy often results in a fracture and division of the venue into smaller agencies that are run according to the vision of each *boss*. In the case of small agencies, *the bosses* often supervise the female workers on their own, introducing *the management style* that they prefer. However, in the case of larger venues, the frames of behavior towards the female workers that they established are executed by trusted employees (e.g. security workers or bartenders).

The type of agency and the kind of relationships that exist there exert a significant influence on the further process of *getting involved* in prostitution. The more *oppressive* the venue where a woman works, and the longer she stays there, the higher the risk of experiencing the negative consequences of prostitution, also in the biographical dimension. The closer the relationships with *the boss* are to the *distanced* or *kind professionalism*, the greater the female worker's chance is of using her job in the agency as a *springboard* (cf. Ślęzak 2009: 100–104) to finding another way of earning money, or at least to minimizing the risk and costs related to the provision of sex services.

2.5. STRATEGIES ADOPTED BY FEMALE WORKERS IN VARIOUS MANAGEMENT STYLES

When starting to work in an agency with a specific management style, *the novices* developed some ways of dealing with *the bosses'* objectifying actions. The shape and intensity of their responses depended to a great extent on how they interpreted the situation they found themselves in, the explanations of this situation provided by the coworkers, as well as how a given woman perceived herself, and what stage she was at in her involvement in prostitution.

One of the dominating strategies was *withdrawal*, i.e., giving up working in the agency when relationships with *the boss* did not turn out the way the female worker wanted them to:

In any case, you know, you can work out what the boss is like on the first week, you can find out whether someone is ok or there is something wrong with him. Whether it's better to get out, how he treats the girls, you can see it. [R23]

Withdrawal can take place in every management style and at every stage of the process of getting involved in work in an agency. It might be the first and only strategy, or the last one. It expresses the lack of faith that negotiations with *the boss* regarding his conduct towards the female worker will bring any results. Therefore, instead of openly presenting her postulates, the female worker just leaves the venue, usually immediately, without any notice. In the case of venues with the *oppressive* or *fraternization* management styles, leaving expresses the female worker's lack of consent to being objectified in various dimensions of the *work situation*. However, the *withdrawal* may also be a response to excessive requirements presented by *the boss* and his attempts to make the agency's organizational style similar to *normal* workplaces (as in the *professional style*) which the female worker is not ready for at that time.

After all, *withdrawal* is not a strategy of passivity but the active rejection of the definition of the situation imposed by *the boss*. When deciding to leave, the women must take the risk of change and re-adaptation to another venue. Interviewees with greater experience in working in agencies were more inclined to undertake those actions. Often, they have already experienced changes of venues, and they were aware of how different they can be. Therefore, they interpreted their leaving the agency as an opportunity to find a better place (that you can still always leave):

You can't say: "I have nowhere to go," because there are hundreds of such places. You work for a day, you don't like it, they'll accept you in another place with open arms. [R23]

Another strategy is *conformist adaptation*, which consists in adopting the role of a *devoted worker*, subordinate to *the boss* and his principles. This is how those women who saw no opportunity for a better job (or a better agency), but also those who had no experience in the world of indoor prostitution, adapted to the management style employed in a given venue. At the beginning of their process of becoming involved in prostitution, they usually accept the principles determined by *the boss* with no protest, because they did not know that an agency could be organized differently. They thought that they could not oppose or disagree with *the boss*, or that the working conditions they encountered were similar to those they had expected to see in such a venue. One of the interviews conducted with a *novice* female worker with one week's experience exemplifies this:

I hope that I don't meet [pause] an exhausting client, regarding, you know what. And that's what I'm afraid of, very much. That someone will be pissed off, and then I don't know, I won't go with him. I don't know if I can do that. I must ask the boss. I didn't ask about that kind of thing. [R48]

It means that it was not obvious to this worker that she could say no to being with a client who acts aggressively. Before she decides to stop the meeting, she will ask *the boss* what solution is acceptable in the venue. Even in the case of such a crucial matter as her own security or health, she does not turn to her own evaluation of the situation, instead she is ready to behave according to the words of a person who does not care about her and whose aims are not to do with her well-being but with making a profit. Such patterns of behavior were often carried out by women with low self-esteem, who had some trouble with self-respect. As a result of the stigma they experienced and the feeling of guilt, some of them interpreted all bad experiences as punishment for providing sex services.

This strategy was also adopted by women addicted to psychoactive substances in the final stages of their careers in indoor sex work. Their physical and mental condition was so bad that demonstrating conformist attitudes was a condition of having the possibility to work in a given venue at all.

In the case of venues with an *oppressive management style*, *conformist adaptation* can lead to a situation when the female worker is abused and forced to perform actions that are dangerous to her health. However, this strategy may take completely different forms in venues managed in the *distanced* and *kind professionalism* style. Then, carrying out the role of a *devoted worker* means an increase in involvement in work, discipline, punctual arrival at the agency, and treating it in categories of professional work, where you need to be dutiful and loyal:

I'm such a person that if I have this job, whatever happens, come rain or shine, I will always be there at eight in the evening. There's no other way. And when it comes to free days, as I have already said, I take days off when, you know, when I feel I really can't do it. But as I say, one or two free days, and there's no problem. [R35]

The bosses become a reference group (Shibutani 1962, 1976; Kuhn 1976; Łoś 1976a, 1976b; Ziółkowski 1981) for the female workers who realize this strategy. They try to earn their praise, distancing themselves from those coworkers who are *up to something*, who do not follow the same pattern. Such an approach was typical of the slightly older female workers (over 30 years old), who had previously worked in *normal workplaces*, maybe transferring certain habits from there. These women usually did not have much experience in escort agencies.

A strategy that was not observed very often was *open negation of the principles applicable in the venue* by the female worker. When describing their actions within this strategy, the interviewees usually started with the words: "I really gave it to her" or "I told him." Such actions, even though they can bring some relief resulting from articulating previously hidden sentiments, may expose the female workers to aggression from *the boss*, financial penalties or dismissal. Therefore, critical comments were definitely repeated more often *behind the boss's back*. Open criticism of the work organization was usually expressed by the women

who were preparing themselves to leave the venue and felt that they did not have much to lose. An argument with *the boss* was, in such cases, the final impulse to change agency:

I know we work as prostitutes, but we are not things, and won't allow ourselves to be treated like this. I told him that, and he said that he was my boss, and if I didn't like it, I could pack my things and leave. [R28]

A dominant strategy among the interviewees was the *facade of acceptance*, which consisted in apparent consent to the existing situation, but at the same time carrying out camouflaged actions to adapt the working conditions to their expectations (e.g. triggered by promises made by *the boss* during the *job interviews*). Within this strategy, the female workers aimed at improving their independence and the degree of control over the pace of work and the working conditions, as well as the size of the remuneration (cf. Jeffrey, MacDonald 2006: 313). The identity transformations that take place while working in the agency help the women start to adopt this strategy. It is related to how the women define themselves in the context of providing sex services and their perception of prostitution (cf. Chapter 3) and, as a result, how they would like to be treated by *the boss*. While carrying out this strategy, the female workers did not define themselves in the categories of *submissive prostitutes*, who should agree to everything that they encounter, or *venue workers*, obliged to perform their duties loyally. They saw themselves as a kind of *freelancer*, who joins a given agency, but only if the conditions are appropriate. Despite the fact that the interviewees who engaged in this strategy specified their actions as work (not pathology, crime or deviation), it does not mean that they believed it was necessary for the agencies to introduce principles similar to those of *normal jobs*. On the contrary, they expected *the bosses* to provide them with a margin of freedom, which would compensate for the inconveniences related to the provision of sex services which result from the legal situation (lack of legal employment, awareness of the fact that the agency *boss* is breaking the law by deriving benefits from prostitution), the social perception of prostitution, but above all the specificity of the content of their work, which interferes with the most intimate spheres of life more intensively than others.

A specific hot spot in determining and executing the organizational principles was the times that the women worked. Based on discussions with the female workers, I can state that it is the *flexible working time* – apart from financial matters – that is the primary motive which encourages a woman to start and continue working in an agency. It allows *the bosses* to adjust the intensity of the work to the actual needs, but also to possibilities of the female worker. However, this means changeability and unpredictability in running the agency, which they would like to minimize or at least control. Despite the lack of employment contracts, they expect the female workers to be punctual and attend work every day, during hours

that were agreed on beforehand (preferably more frequently and longer), and giving prior notification of their absences and clearly stating how long they would last. These actions can be interpreted as an attempt by *the bosses* to introduce a work time settlement mode known in typical *normal workplaces*. However, contrary to *the bosses'* expectations, the female workers who adopted the *facade of acceptance* did not feel obliged to follow the determined principles:

You know, no one is registered here, so actually the girls come to work more laid-back. They get late to work definitely more often than would happen in a normal job. And for sure, more often they let themselves do something like you know, you wake up, you have a headache, so you don't go to work. The attitude towards this job is definitely different than towards a normal job. [R1]

At the same time, the female workers noticed that although it was thanks to their actions that the venue could operate (being involved in sexual intercourse with the clients, and giving a significant part of their earnings to the agency *bosses*), they are not treated by the supervisors appropriately. From the perspective of the interviewees, the security workers and *the bosses* should take care of the women providing sex services rather than make claims regarding taking control of their work:

When it comes to the boss, it's like we shouldn't even have to ask the boss, because we're not registered, and actually he has the money thanks to US and NOT his own work. If it weren't for us, HE WOULDN'T HAVE that money. I think he should respect us a little more, because we come and make money not only for ourselves, but also for HIM. And you know, we should have days off whenever we want to. Right? He never shows us any mercy or anything. You know, when I came here, he said we'd have free hours, and it would be ok, but now when there's a free day, he makes a big fuss about it. [R6]

To balance the experienced asymmetry between the expectations of *the boss* and their own needs, the interviewees developed a *balance principle*, which can be briefly defined as: the working conditions determine the work. If both parties assumed *the principle of mutual concessions* when agreeing to provide sex services and hand over part of their earnings to the agency *bosses*, the female workers should, in exchange, obtain at least flexible working conditions. However, *the boss* and employees often do not understand each other's point of view, as they see the agency reality from a different perspective, perceiving each other as enemies. During the research, I rarely heard opinions proving that the female workers understand the point of view of *the bosses*, regarding the introduction of principles that regulate when the women work. Similarly, *the bosses* also did not understand or accept that, e.g., after a difficult meeting with a client, a woman would not go to the agency for several days. In a situation when both sides make mutual ac-

cusations of ill will, it is hard to openly negotiate and achieve an understanding. The female workers who do not attempt to convince *the boss* to their point of view, assuming that it will not succeed, become subordinate to the unaccepted principles (cf. *conformist acceptance*) or leave the agency (cf. *withdrawal*). However, women with greater experience take some actions that they hope will have an impact on their working conditions. They consist in the *facade of acceptance* of principles determined by *the boss* and their conscious violation, but in a way that remains unnoticeable for *the boss* or allows a reliable explanation for their behavior:

The boss is a boor and a simpleton, grasping for money. Horribly grasping for money. He doesn't make any investments here. He is so not ok that he cuts off the gas, or turns down the heating. It's cold at night. And the girls told him: "would you like half of us to get sick and no one comes to work? Nobody with flu will come here, and one person will get sick because of all the others." So we did it our way, we turned it on, and turned it off before we left, so he didn't notice. [laughter] [R28]

When I needed it, I took a day off. I just went home and didn't go to work the next day, and when the boss called me I turned off my phone. And then I told her some things, I made something up. [R43]

Therefore, the actions that *the bosses* perceive as lack of intelligence, ill will, or laziness, the female workers see as an attempt to mark their agency and autonomy. This is how the female workers try to reduce the asymmetry of power in the relationships with *the boss*, who can *dismiss* them at any moment, but actually, it remains somehow dependent on them. Hence, these actions signify an element of the fight for dignity in the relationships with *the boss*, even if he does not interpret them this way (cf. Gorzko 2005). Although *the bosses* define women who employ this strategy as *spoiled by the agency*, when different perspectives clash, it is an expression of the search for optimum work conditions by both parties, a result of which is that some concessions must be made.

2.6. SUMMARY

In escort agencies, analogically to other workplaces, the relationships between the superior and subordinates adopt various forms, starting with cooperation, which brings benefits to both parties, and ending with abuse and exploitation (Weitzer 2013: 714). Relationships between the female workers and *the boss* can be considered a process which develops through subsequent stages: from the *job interview*, through the *deconstruction of composure work* and identifying the management style that dominates in the venue, to various ways of adjusting to

this style (*conformist adaptation, open negation of principles, facade acceptance*) or *leaving* the agency. From the perspective of people managing the agency, the most advantageous is the pattern of *conformist adaptation*. However, the female workers who can shape their relationships with *the boss* to adjust them to their needs, or who choose to leave the venue and find a new one, have more favorable working conditions. Therefore, they are able to minimize the disadvantageous aspects of the job and use all advantages of the cooperation with the agency when compared to the provision of sex services without any organizational background.

Relationships established with *the boss* exert an enormous influence on subsequent stages of the process of getting involved in prostitution. They may equip a female worker with resources that provide her with a *springboard* to better working conditions, or, on the contrary, contribute to her degradation.

The work principles agreed on with *the boss* provide a framework where interactions with the other actors of the agency's world take place. Together with other workers, the women work out more detailed guidelines that regulate the practice of everyday work in the venue, which might overlap with the expectations of *the boss*. Interactions with clients provide a highly significant area of regulations, when particular dimensions of the *work situations* in the agency can be seen at once. These notions will be discussed in further chapters.

RELATIONS BETWEEN CO-WORKERS – RIVALRY VERSUS COOPERATION¹

The interactions between the female workers and *the bosses* of the venues discussed in the previous chapter are mostly related to the organizational aspects of the *work situation* in escort agencies. However, the process of anticipatory socialization within the group of co-workers is of crucial significance for how actions related to the provision of sex services are carried out. During this type of socialization, a new female worker acquires knowledge related to a social role that is unknown to her, familiarizes herself with new terms and hidden meanings, and the symbolic as well as motivational and interpretative schemes that are applicable in the workplace (c.f. Berger, Luckmann 1967). Therefore, through intensive interactions, the female worker identifies and negotiates the significance of the role of a person providing sex services. The process of group socialization takes place at the same time, when *the new*, her co-workers and the group as a whole adjust and attune themselves to each other. This is realized through communication and the development of a unique culture and group structures which allows individual and collective goals to be achieved (Adams, Galanes 2008: 190). The process of adaptation and organizational socialization is thus of a complex and gradual character. In this chapter, I would like to look at it from the perspective adopted by the group that a new female worker joins.

3.1. THE PROCESS OF RECONSTRUCTING A HIERARCHY IN A GROUP OF CO-WORKERS

The process of creating, maintaining and reconstructing a hierarchy in a small social group is related to individual differences of the authority, influence, and significance of its members. Based on those differences, a hierarchy or a system of status inequality emerges within it, communicated and enforced through various practices (Lofland et al. 2009: 200). At the same time, there might be conflicts around a position in the group, the hierarchical structure itself or between two or more hierarchical systems in a given setting, leading to the reconstruction of the existing stratification order (Lofland et al. 2009: 202). These processes will be discussed in this subchapter in relation to a group of co-workers in an escort agency.

¹ Some notions included in this chapter were raised in the article Ślęzak (2014a).

The organizational structure in escort agencies is usually simple. The highest positions (apart from *the male or female boss*) are occupied by those responsible for supervising and recording meetings with the clients, as well as for receiving, storing and settling the payments they make. Regarding the organization of work, these tasks are delegated to managers of the agencies, the security workers or bartenders, and less often to trusted sex workers. High positions are also occupied by *resident security workers* (more about it in Chapter 6), responsible for maintaining safety and order in the venue.

The women providing sex services are lower in the organizational hierarchy than the other mentioned categories of workers, and it is hard for them to raise this position. However, some very dynamic changes can be observed within the group of co-workers. This informal hierarchy is continuously under reconstruction regarding the *permanent* character of the recruitment process. The position in the hierarchy is determined, first of all, by the quality of the relationship with *the boss* and other workers (bartenders, security) and the popularity among clients, reflected in the level of earnings. As the strategies for *winning clients* and increasing profits will be discussed in subsequent chapters, I would like to focus here on the issue regarding the influence exerted on the organizational hierarchy by the relationships with *the boss*, security workers, and bartenders.

Establishing a close relationship with *the boss* is the most effective strategy for an advantageous change in the informal hierarchy of the venue. From *the bosses'* perspective, not all female workers are worth the same level of interest, and they do not interact equally with all of them, apart from during their first days at work. First of all, the female workers who stand out with their erotic capital and who present an approved approach to work can count on their attention. *The bosses* not only communicate with the selected female workers more frequently and kindly, but they are also ready to invest some funds in them (e.g. their appearance), expecting profits in the future. Hence, it is often the case that they adopt milder rules and provide them with more advantageous working conditions, allowing them to take actions for which other female workers would be punished. They also try to create a bond, so that they stay in their venue longer, e.g., by concluding employment contracts with them. Such actions are, of course, noticed by the other female workers who, ignored by *the boss*, can perceive it as an additional source of humiliation and objectification. Once ascribed, categories are highly difficult to change; thus, often the only way to remove the label of a “non-promising” worker is to leave the venue and develop a different pattern of relations with *the boss* of another agency:

There was something like... he always had girls he preferred, always some girls were rejected, no contact. And here, he treats everyone the same, there's no division into smaller groups. [R12]

The women who decided to stay in the agency and undertake actions intended to gain recognition from *the boss*, and at the same time to raise their position compared to their female co-workers and other workers, selected one of two *promotion paths*. The first path assumed establishing sexual relations with *the boss*:

This lover boy, he was young and pretty, they hit on him themselves. These young bimbos. They thought: "I'll go to bed with the boss so I will be favored." [R51]

However, it should be stressed that for this action to be effective, additional conditions must be fulfilled. The more accidental the character of the sexual relations, and the greater the number of female worker that *the boss* has intercourse with, the lower their significance in determining a woman's place in the organizational hierarchy. However, if *the boss* has sexual relations with only one female worker, and this relationship is longer (this is a relative notion), it may lead to the emergence of a new status in the hierarchy of the venue's workers, called *the boss's girl*. Even though she still provides sex services, she obtains a certain scope of influence on the decisions related to the current issues of the agency, and often better working conditions.

On the other hand, the first promotion path can contribute to conflicts in the group of co-workers. They are rooted in the rivalry for *the boss's* favors and the feeling of unfairness if a high position is taken by a woman who – according to the female co-workers – should not get it.

In MY case it was that the girls were jealous. Because earlier, it was like the girl that had been here the longest, and she was simply with the boss and nobody got angry, and when she left, the one that was a little lower was with the boss. And because I was new there, and I came into the hierarchy, somehow, suddenly, that is why it turned out rather badly. I didn't know that things were like that there, and I went too high too quickly. [...] Because it was like that I had worked there for almost a whole year, and there were these girls who had worked for 4 or 5 years, so this time period was necessary. So, the old girls, who had already been there for some year, blew up, and it wasn't very nice. [R33]

A promotion in the organizational hierarchy may also result from the trust that *the boss* puts in the female workers. Its source is from observing a given woman, her behavior and approach to work, how she deals with clients and co-workers in her routine work at the agency. This is how the women with longer tenure in a given venue and more experience in prostitution built their position. A positive assessment may result in *the boss* delegating additional tasks to a trusted female worker and see her taking on the role of his *informal deputy*, his *right hand*. She is responsible for what goes on in the group of female workers while he is away, and for taking care of *the novices*:

She works here on the night shift, she lives here, and of course she is like a manager of the night shift, she can dismiss or employ girls, so everything depends on her. But she does the same work as we do. The boss just trusts her. [R3]

However, playing the role of *the boss's right hand* is difficult because it requires continuous mediations between the supervisor and the sex workers. The colleagues often asked such a person, based on her better relationship with *the boss*, to present their postulates related to changes in the working conditions, or to mediate in the case of conflicts. This role also requires her to maintain the feeling of community with her co-workers, so she can become and stay their informal leader, despite the need to discipline or admonish them. Apart from the practical difficulties, playing the role of *an informal deputy of the boss* may be a highly positive experience, strengthening the self-esteem and feeling of agency in a given woman. This position is related to having a certain impact on the working conditions for herself and others.

Finally, it should be noted that it was not the case that both types of promotion were possible or practiced in each venue. This is a result of *the boss's* vision of the organization (e.g. in the case of the management style based on *distanced* or *kind professionalism*, sexual relations with female workers do not happen) or a lack of candidate that would play such a role.

The promotion of a female worker up the organizational hierarchy is also influenced by her relationships with the security workers and bartenders. These relationships can adopt forms similar to those described in the previous chapter, between *the boss* and the female workers (they can be of an *oppressive* character, based on *excessive fraternization*, or adopt the form of *distanced* or *kind professionalism*). This is because *the bosses* expect the workers to share their vision of the organizational management. However, the security workers and bartenders, in contrast to *the bosses*, have frequent and intensive interactions with the sex workers. And within the course of their everyday work, they are definitely more aware of the fact that it is necessary to find a balance between maintaining a distance from them and fraternizing, and between being strict and allowing them to violate the rules (in particular circumstances). This provides the female workers with opportunities to establish the kind of relationships with them that would allow them to negotiate more advantageous working conditions and improve their position in the venue.

In the case of agencies that adopted the *oppressive management style* or that are based on *fraternization*, the female workers strive to shorten the distance and obtain some influence on the security workers and bartenders by making use of sexual and quasi-sexual behaviors. This is a kind of a *strategic alliance* which both parties derive benefits from, while at the same time suffering certain costs. Establishing a sexual relationship may be reflected in an increase in the significance of the woman in the venue's hierarchy. The higher the position of the female

worker's "lover", the greater the promotion; but there is also greater access to organizational knowledge, therefore, there will be an impact on what goes on in the agency.

It should be stressed that a relationship with a security worker or a bartender may be a goal in itself or a strategically planned *springboard* to a romance with a more significant worker or *the boss* himself:

There was this security guy in the place where that boss was [...], so I did it on purpose to get the boss to notice me, I started to use the feelings of the security guys. There was this security guy, I didn't like him at all, he was even ugly, but I copped off with him on purpose, so the boss would see me. And it worked to some extent. Because he said something, taunted and you know, mocked him, that he had tried to do something with the girls; and I wanted to have some contact with this boss, even if it was just though the security guy. [R33]

In turn, the quasi-sexual relations between the venue workers break the monotony of the work and help to unload emotions that emerge as a result.² This is supported by the atmosphere in the agency, where topics related to sex, corporeality, and eroticism are common. "Worker flirting" (cf. Konecki 2007) is mostly verbal, in the form of compliments expressed in a specific "agency-style" language regarding the outfit, figure, and stories of a potential sex life together. It can also be reflected in particular actions: touching, hugging, "neatening" the clothes, sitting on someone's knee, massaging their back. In the researched venues, it was initiated by both male workers and the women providing sex services. The *flirting* is of a humorous character and is not taken seriously (cf. Konecki 2007: 76). It is exposed, open, performed in the presence and often with the active participation of the other female workers (cf. Konecki 2007: 77) when there are not many clients in the venue. In the case of an agency with a management style *based on fraternization*, they are actually an element of the organizational culture. These actions are of an integrating character, strengthening the bonds within a group, helping to create a good working atmosphere and contributing to communication between the different categories of workers (cf. Konecki 2007: 80):

If there were only women, without those security guys, I'm not sure if there would be so much fun. Because there is always a security guy, so if any of us wants to talk to him, it's great to have someone you can get made up for, dress up for and show yourself off [laughter]. It's very positive with the boss or security guys, and if they are handsome, it's great [laughter], it really gives a lot, because you don't need to dress up for the clients, because they won't appreciate it anyway, they just look, fine, it's ok. And it's quite different with security guys. Nicer. [R33]

² Obviously, it refers to mutually consensual actions.

However, sexual relations between workers can, in some cases, destabilize the order in the venue. They disturb the distance between the security workers and the women providing sex services and they may lead to changes in the hierarchy that are not accepted by the co-workers. There is a risk that the sexual relations might evolve into emotional relationships. In the case of the people employed in the agency, the most available partners, both in sexual and emotional terms, apart from the clients, are the other workers. However, the emotional involvement and bond contribute to the emergence of negative – as perceived by *the boss* – phenomena: mutual jealousy and avoidance of work by the women:

Because it's like when a girl is with a security guy and a client comes, it's like the guy is just jealous of the girl. And from this girl's perspective, it's like he's watching and she must go with someone else. And the clients are different. You sometimes even feel sorry when you see someone like that, not to mention [pause], so you know how it ends. The girl doesn't work, she doesn't come to the agency, there's no profit because she doesn't want to go to the room, and the security guy can make a fuss as well. There was this girl in the previous club who hooked up with a security guy, and both she and the guy left. Me, at the beginning, when I fooled around with this security guy, I felt like an idiot, a REAL idiot, going to the room. So, it's practically banned. [R33]

Therefore, in the case of venues with a *professional management style*, sexual contact and emotional relationships between workers are forbidden and penalized financially (but it does not mean that they do not happen). In such situations, establishing and maintaining relationships that would provide a chance to develop various types of *alliances* between the workers requires other resources.

Determining the proper distance to keep from the women providing sex services is a challenge for the workers who supervise them. In venues adopting the *professional management style*, these relations should be close enough so as to enable the communication necessary for the *security work* to be carried out effectively (cf. Chapter 6). To achieve it, there is often the need to “make concessions”, to “work it out;” thus, to allow the female worker to *bend the rules*, not to discourage her from working in a given venue. If a situation requires, it will necessary to execute the principles determined by *the boss*, meaning warning and punishing the women. Hence, the relationships between the women providing sex services and the security workers are continuously being negotiated. A significant condition that interferes with the course of these negotiations are the affections or antipathies towards the female workers. Therefore, establishing and maintaining more subjective, quasi-friendly relationships with the security workers or bartenders was a priority for many of the interviewees. Getting them to listen, making them confidants and comforters, was of a strategic nature, which the women could use to their advantage in the future. In many cases, it was also an attempt

to develop some sort of close relationship that the women were missing in their lives. A kind acquaintance with another worker (but not a sex worker, who might be perceived as a rival in the fight for a client, and who might also perceive herself in this way) provided an opportunity to establish “normal,” friendly relationships in the workplace:

If their characters matched, a girl with a security guy, they talked to each other normally about everything, and it was very nice and pleasant. [...] If he liked a girl, then there was a conversation, if not, there was nothing to talk about. Me, for example, I had this friend, ten years younger than me, and I can tell you that it was very nice to talk to him, and vice versa, we sometimes understood each other without words. [R45]

Both presented *promotion paths* allow the women to achieve slightly more advantageous working conditions without the need to negotiate them openly with *the boss*. A worker connected (through sexual or friendly relations) with a given woman can help her bypass the rules and hide their violation, e.g., turn a blind eye to drinking alcohol or taking drugs (in amounts that can make it impossible to welcome clients), being late for work or leaving earlier, conflicts with clients or other behaviors that should be sanctioned and penalized financially. The security workers can also agree to reduce the duration of a meeting with a client (of course, in a way the client would not notice) or he might let a given woman not go out to other clients if she does not want to. Such actions are possible if the relationships between the security workers and the women providing sex services are good, both parties trust one another, and they do not report their actions to *the boss*. However, in extreme situations, the *alliances* made in such a manner can pose a source of serious problems for the venue. It happened in the researched agencies that a bartender or a security worker, together with a female worker (or female workers), acted to the detriment of *the boss*, committing fraud and theft, mostly in terms of recording when meetings with clients had taken place (reporting understated data on the number of clients and payments they made) and the sales of drinks (e.g. earning money from selling the drinks they brought to the venue themselves instead of those they should take from the bar). Not keeping to the allotted time frame was another source of losses, especially when the worker not only let the women leave for home earlier, but he did the same himself, closing the venue. I observed such actions in periods of low *traffic* in those agencies, where the remuneration of bartenders and security workers did not depend on commission. It is hard for *the boss* to identify these incidents if the other workers or clients do not report them to him. However, if there is any evidence of a gross violation of principles (e.g. apart from the previously mentioned ones, this might include abusing alcohol during work time and taking it secretly from the agency’s bar, a lack of punctuality and not appearing at work at all, or being involved in conflicts with female workers or clients), then the troublesome worker is dismissed.

Summing up, the place occupied by a female worker in the organizational hierarchy affects, to some extent, the possibility of her influencing and modify the working conditions; thus, minimizing some negative aspects of prostitution, at least those related to how the work is organized. In certain situations (e.g. while playing a role of *the boss's right hand*) a given female worker can impact the organizational policy and human resources issues, which she can make to her own advantage (e.g. to get rid of the female workers that pose a competition). The position they occupy in the venue is also related to the female worker's self-esteem – a higher place in the hierarchy can contribute to the development of a more positive vision of self (as a person who is appreciated and can manage in any conditions). At the same time, the ordering of the position is of a processual and dynamic character. It is continuously reconstructed, above all because of the intensified fluctuation of the female workers. When a person who has earned a certain position leaves a venue, there is a gap that the other female workers desire to fill. In turn, the employment of *a new* female worker threatens the existing *status quo* that the remaining female workers are attempting to maintain. Therefore, relationships between fellow workers make up a delicate network of interdependencies which is continuously maintained, confirmed and constructed, as each change triggers the need to renegotiate the whole structure. Hence, the interactions that allow the workers to confirm and modify the distances are of crucial significance (cf. Konecki 2006).

3.2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CO-WORKERS

One event that threatens the agreed order, although it happens systematically, is the employment of *a new* female worker. The actions that she undertakes may lead to the existing arrangement of positions in all three dimensions being reorganized – she can establish better relationships with *the boss*, other workers and clients. Special concerns are triggered by those women who had a “golden hello” and who established a good relationship with *the boss* on the first day, which is unattainable or hard to achieve for numerous female workers. Hence, the arrival of *the new* female worker triggers intensified interest on the part of the other female workers who monitor her subsequent steps in the agency. At the same time, at the beginning, *the novice* may not realize the enormous impact that her relationships with the venue's other workers will exert on the course of her work, especially those with the other female workers. She usually focuses on establishing a good relationship with *the boss* (who controls the working conditions) and clients (posing a source of income). However, it is the group of female co-workers where the *metanorms* are determined and executed. The co-workers can be a source of sup-

port or, on the contrary, hinder the provision of work, and, in some extreme cases, make *the new* leave the agency. Thus, relationships with those co-workers shape the *work situation* to a significant degree.

The first contacts with *the new* worker are related to the process of introducing her to the organization, i.e., employing and welcoming her, as well as communicating some basic information that she needs to get acquainted with the new situation and start working (Armstrong 2005: 414). In the researched venues, *the bosses* did not attach special importance to this phase and did not get involved in it (an exception here is provided by the female workers who are seen as especially valuable for the venue, cf. Chapter 2), leaving it up to a designated female worker to carry it out (e.g. playing the role of his *right hand*) or to the goodwill of the other female workers. Those interactions took place in the context of specific features of the agency type of prostitution, where the continuous changeability of staff is especially significant. Female workers leaving the agency and new ones appearing is an everyday experience, even in smaller venues. I had an opportunity to observe this phenomenon multiple times during my research. Almost every visit to a venue meant getting to know new female workers and finding out which previous ones had left the venue. It also meant collecting information about the women who had decided to start and end their cooperation with a given place. Hence, the following can be differentiated when it comes to the female workers:

- the (relatively) permanent *core of the team*, composed of the women who work in a given agency for the longest time (which may mean a period of several weeks to even several years), and are familiar with the work principles that are applicable there;

- *new female workers* that can be divided into the *beginners* (those who had not provided sex services beforehand and did not know the principles of how the work was organized in the agencies) and the *continuing* (experienced in sex work, but in another venue or another form of prostitution, thus becoming familiar with the work principles in a given agency again). According to the interviewees, women from the second category made up the majority of female workers who took up work in the researched venues.

Some of those new female workers, after the adaptation period, join the *core* of the team and are bound to it for a longer time, but most of them leave the agency before that stage is accomplished. As a result, it is necessary to constantly confirm the organizational order and to arrange the female workers' hierarchy, which is permanently in a state of unstable equilibrium.

Another element of the context in which the interactions between female co-workers take place is the requirements to act on two levels of principles: those determined by the managers of the venue and those which are actually implemented, developed within the group of co-workers. Respecting the arrangements made within the group contributes to the integration of the female workers and the creation of professional solidarity.

Finally, the specifics of work related to the rivalry for clients, as well as emotional tensions, provide an important element of the context. It can destabilize group actions, support individualization and promote conflicts among the female workers.

Taking into account all the contextual elements, below I will present the subsequent stages of developing relations between an agency's female workers. For this purpose, I will adopt the perspective of the female workers who create *the core of the team*.

3.2.1. The positioning of a new female worker

For the first period of work, characteristic features include the high level of distrust towards a new female worker and scrutinizing her actions towards clients and other workers (cf. Oyster 2002). As a result, *the new* undergoes a *positioning* process that leads to an evaluation of whether she will pose some serious competition in winning clients, and whether she will threaten the existing order among the agency's workers. To evaluate that, the female workers undertake a series of actions towards *the new*: *reconstruction of the biography*, *evaluating her attitude towards other female workers* and *estimating her erotic capital*, which will be described below.

3.2.1.1. Reconstruction of the biography of a new worker

The process of *reconstructing the biography* is intended to collect some information necessary to develop an image of who the new female worker is, in both the professional and personal dimensions. This reconstruction covers several spheres. First of all, it includes information about their previous experiences in prostitution, which allows the women to determine whether the new female worker is a *beginner* or *continuing*. Thanks to their judgments of her level of experience, it is possible to make an initial evaluation of what position she will be trying to take in a given venue when it comes to her relationship with *the boss*, her female co-workers and the clients. Both types of female workers are embraced by the co-workers in various manners, and their *professional socialization* also takes place differently. Based on observations and interviews, a thesis can be put forward that it is the *beginning female worker* who can count on more patience and empathy in the first period of work. Thanks to the reciprocity of perspectives (Schutz 1982), the female co-workers understand and somehow feel all over again the intense emotions related to the first period of work. This contributes to treating *the new* in a gentler manner:

Generally, when she [a new *beginner* – note by I.Š.] comes, the girls show her their rooms, what the conditions are, it's not like they look frown at her, just wanting her to go away. But I'm talking about what it's usually like, because it may happen that

the situation is different. But they usually look at her rather positively, because they know what they felt when they came to work. [R33]

Some women getting involved in prostitution again after a longer break, or in another city, try to make use of this mechanism, introducing themselves as *beginners* so they can get a friendlier introduction into the *work situation*. However, it is not hard for experienced female workers to uncover this game:

Everything depends on the girl, because she's also easy to inspect. She sits with us and says stuff that makes me like her, it's obvious, you can't hide that: "you know what, it's my first job like this." And it's noticeable, she's more nervous than anyone, and when I look at her I can see myself three years ago. And it's different when a girl sits down [pretends to be chewing a gum – note by I.Š.] "and what about the benefits here?" You can see it at once. It's a new girl in this group but not a new girl in this world. And then you say how much you get for what, this is what you get for an hour, and that's it. And the girl who is completely new, she won't ask about it, because she even doesn't know that she should. [R16]

It does not mean the new *continuing* female workers are always treated in a hostile manner. However, the female co-workers approach them with more reserve, as, regarding their experience, they can be serious competition in the rivalry for the clients.

Within the scope of *biography reconstruction*, the female co-workers also try to find out where and for how long *the new* worked previously, and possibly how much she earned there. Identifying her *career path* gives an image of how she works and popularity among clients. It also allows them to determine whether there are any mutual friends who could tell them something more about *the new* female worker. An advantage that results from recognizing *career paths* is also the possibility to exchange information about other agencies and the working conditions that are applicable there. It is especially valuable for those female workers who have been connected to one place for an extended period. They derive their knowledge about the local sex market only from clients or advertisements published on, e.g., the Internet. Thanks to the information from other female workers, they can compare the working conditions in various agencies, and then plan to change the venue. It is often the case that as a result of such conversations, the women make sure that their current place is the most advantageous from the perspective of criteria that they find important.

Therefore, the biography of *the new* is usually *reconstructed* within the organizational perspective. This helps to anticipate how her style of work can influence the *status quo* in the venue. Nevertheless, information related to the personal life of *the new* in the context of prostitution is collected simultaneously. The main spheres of interest include the time a given women has provided sex services, the reasons behind her decision, the attitude of her relatives to her

work, and her family situation, etc. This information allows the other women to indirectly anticipate the style of work of *the new* (e.g. a difficult economic and family situation would encourage her to undertake more frequent meetings with clients). They are also important in the context of establishing and maintaining group relations. The similarity of situations is also a basis for creating peer groups according to the principle of common conversation topics and experiences (Oyster 2002: 86). Therefore, *reconstruction of the biography* is also intended to answer questions about the social identity (Goffman 1963) of a new employee.

The obtained information is hard to verify, so the possibilities and potential advantages from the *fabrication of a biography* and presenting oneself as a different person (e.g. similar to the female co-workers or outperforming them in any terms) are high. The experienced female workers, in particular, are inclined towards communicating incomplete or false information about themselves, to prevent them being used against them in case of conflict (cf. *hostile actions*). Although the female co-workers usually seem to believe their colleagues' stories, they are gossiped about behind the scenes, regarding both their reliability and moral evaluation.

The researched *new female workers* executed various strategies for communicating information about themselves within the process of *reconstructing the biography*:

- *a closed attitude* – consisting of isolation and restraining themselves from revealing any information about themselves to their female co-workers. However, it must be stressed that the more closed the attitude, the higher the risk that the adaptation period of a new female worker will be longer;

- *an attitude of restricting information* – related to presenting only selected (often basic) information (real or made-up), usually not under their own initiative but as a result of the female co-workers *grilling* them or situational *blurting out*;

- *an open attitude* – when a woman was not reluctant and shared with information about her life (real or made-up for the needs of the developed image), often of her own initiative. This attitude may be a manifestation of the openness or a conscious strategy to create a desired image of herself. From the group's point of view, sharing information about oneself is seen as an effort towards integration (although whether it takes place depends on the content of the messages and mostly on the actions undertaken by *the new*), so it may contribute to the development of bonds between female co-workers and shorten the adaptation period.

Reconstruction of the biography does not happen at once. It is a process that lasts the whole time a female worker is present in a venue. Along with getting familiar with new information, it can become a process of *deconstructing the fictional biography of the new female worker*.

3.2.1.2. Evaluation of the attitude adopted by *the new* towards the other female workers

The attitude adopted by *the new* towards the other female workers is also observed and evaluated – her readiness to establish relationships with them and subordinate herself to the group norms. In this sphere, two strategies adopted by women who start working in the agency can be differentiated: *inclusive* and *exclusive*. Women who adopted the *inclusive strategy* attempt to get into the network of workers' relationships as quickly as possible, and occupy an appropriate position there, becoming part of the team (Oyster 2002: 102). To be accepted by the others, they present an *open* or, at most, a *restricting* attitude towards the *reconstruction of the biography*. They also try to win over some proponents and people who will guide them through the world of the agency. Therefore, they try to present some good will, a readiness to subordinate themselves to the work principles in a given venue, and mostly to “adjust”:

I think that everything is the matter of your approach to particular people, the skills. You know, I came here, new surroundings, and I didn't have any problems. Everything depends on the person, if she can talk to everyone, to chat, to adjust to the surroundings, then it's easy. But if she can't do this, she won't fit in anywhere. [R38]

Although the more experienced female workers carry out the described actions in a strategic manner, it is a very spontaneous response for *the beginners*, related to an attempt to find themselves in the new reality. Becoming accepted by other female workers provides a feeling of security in the face of one of the greatest fears in one's social life, meaning exclusion from the group (Aronson et al. 1997: 279):

I surely want to make a connection with those girls, not to be on the sidelines like some weirdo. It's obvious that it's better to try to reach out, so it's nice. [R33]

The inclusive strategy is expected and preferred by the experienced female workers. They were usually more kind to *the new* who sought support from them. They interpreted these actions as a signal that *the novice* cares about establishing relationships with the female co-workers (thus, maybe staying in the venue longer).

In contrast to the above-mentioned actions is *the exclusive strategy*. This involves the clear separation and isolation of *the new* from the existing female co-workers, not attempting to establish any kind of rapport with them, and refusing to share any information about themselves. Such behavior triggers a negative response from the group, and it is treated as a violation of the agency's social norms and principles of politeness. They tell the women to introduce themselves and take

part, even if to a minimum degree, in *reconstruction of the biography*. Avoiding contact and remaining apart is perceived as a manifestation of reluctance towards the other female workers and *getting above oneself*, which is a highly sensitive aspect of the mutual relations in the agency. The legitimacy of this interpretation (in some conditions) may be proved by the following quote:

In that agency I used to stick to those normal girls, I didn't talk to those bimbos, because the level was too low for me, right? I was raised differently. [R3]

Another reason why the women did not reach out to their female co-workers on purpose was due to defining the mutual relations only from the perspective of competition and rivalry for clients. Remaining outside the team allowed them to ignore the group standards regarding the principles of work, thus, maximizing profit:

I'm generally not interested in the rest of them [female co-workers – note by I.Š.], as I said, I'm not looking for company here, I'm not looking for friends, it is the boss who is most important, and to earn money, and I don't care what they think. [R21]

However, adopting this technique is burdened with high costs, the feeling of alienation, exclusion from the group and the risk of sanctions that its members will employ towards the “deviant” (Walczak-Duraj 2006a: 187):

One new girl came here yesterday, to apply for a job, a passable woman, about forty I think. And she sat with those girls, and I'm also new, and I sat here [alone in the room - note by I.Š.]. I think that they spoke about one thing there: how awful I am. But I don't care about it; they can say whatever shit they want. [R21]

Contrary to what my interviewee stated, the mental burden related to the role of a group *outsider* is sometimes too high to be bearable. Thus, adopting *the exclusive strategy by the new* is interpreted by the other female workers as a guarantee of her leaving the venue quickly:

Not every girl can fit in with every environment. As I say, those like us, for example, we are just NICE girls, simply nice, down-to-earth, etc., and this one girl comes in, who sits and swings on a chair and says nothing, so it's obvious she won't fit in. She was here for one day and then she was gone. [R38]

However, it was not always the case that this kind of action was planned strategically. Especially for *the beginning* female workers, withdrawal was a spontaneous response to a stressful and frightening situation of starting to work in the agency (cf. Goffman 2011: 144). After some time, the new female worker began to behave more openly; thus, she could build some positive relationships with her colleagues:

The beginning was tough, it was tough. [...] When I came to this club, of course, I was labeled a big lady, because she sits in the corner and says nothing, showing she's better. And I had SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT in my head. It didn't occur to me that they would assess me this way. And it turned out later that I'd made some sort of weird impression on them. [R33]

In turn, the female workers who had had some negative experience from previous venues (e.g. they were victims of *hostile actions*) adopted the *exclusive strategy*, as a defensive action. This is how they tried to build a wall protecting them from the harmful actions of their female co-workers (cf. Adams, Galanes 2008: 193).

3.2.1.3. Estimation of the erotic capital of a new female worker

Estimation of the erotic capital of a new female worker takes place in parallel to the above-mentioned processes of *reconstructing the biography* and *evaluating the attitude towards the female co-workers*. The physical appearance, shape, age, and outfit of *the new* are observed and assessed from the first moments. The new female workers describe this research outlook as *measuring from head to toe*. This is how the other women try to estimate their potential chances with the clients and anticipate whether they will pose a strong competition. Evaluating the appearance is the simplest basis for assessing the popularity of *the new* but it is not always accurate, as it does not consider all aspects of what erotic capital is or what selection criteria are considered by the clients. As a result, it is often the case that underestimated *novices* surprisingly turn out to be very effective at gaining clients. This forces the repeated *corrective evaluation of erotic capital*.

Erotic capital is evaluated in two dimensions: whether it is high or low (according to the subjective opinions of the female workers, often in relation to the ideal concept of a woman who provides sex services and earns good money), and relationally – whether it is higher or lower than the capital of the other female workers in a given venue. The high erotic capital of *a new* suggests more intensive rivalry, but also greater interest in the venue from the clients. Low erotic capital, especially not having the *potential for change* (e.g. age, being excessively overweight) is usually related to a negative evaluation of *the novice*. If the female co-workers see the chance that *the new* will raise her capital, e.g., by *investing in herself* (a change of hairstyle, a visit at the beautician's, sunbed, etc.), her capital can be evaluated higher.

Regarding the evaluation of the erotic capital of *the new*, adaptation can take place in different ways. Those women whose erotic capital does not deviate from the capital of the majority of female workers are accepted in the group in the shortest time. The women with a definitely lower capital are not welcomed, because they will not attract clients to the venue, and they may lower its *reputation*.

However, they are an object of degradation actions, allowing the women to release some negative emotions, especially by those who occupy low positions in the organizational hierarchy. *The new* with a definitely higher capital trigger some concern mostly in those co-workers who earn more. Due to the fact that they occupy higher positions in the hierarchy, they may incite *hostile actions* among the other female workers towards *the new* ones.

Positioning is of a processual character, and it lasts the whole time a woman works in a venue. It is carried out by both sides of the interaction, i.e., by the female workers who accept *the new*, and by *the new* worker, who tries to get some information about her co-workers and understand the relationships within the team (cf. Oyster 2002: 98). These actions are also undertaken by *the boss* and other workers to some extent, but with a slightly lower intensity. The results of those evaluations provide a resource that influences the course of the adaptation and rivalry process that takes place among the female workers. They also influence the women's decisions about whether to stay in a venue or leave it, as well as the pattern of work *the new* will adopt. The *positioning* results in applying one of the two strategies towards the new female worker: *minimum involvement* or *hostile actions*.

3.2.2. *Minimum involvement strategy*

The *minimum involvement strategy* is employed mostly towards *the new* female workers of an average erotic capital (not posing any strong competition), who present an *inclusive strategy* in relation to the co-workers and *open* or, at most, a *restricting* attitude within the *biography reconstruction* process. In the face of the intense fluctuation of female workers, as well as concerns about the influence of *the new* on the *status quo* in the venue, it will “not pay off” to invest in relations with her. As a result, the new female worker is an object of observation, *positioning* and evaluation, and of only the necessary actions related to her *introduction into the work principles* applicable in the venue. They are focused on familiarizing *the new* (both *the beginner* and *the continuing*) with exactly how the work is organized, which includes:

- the scope and price list of the services offered to the clients – it concerns, in particular, the additional, non-standard services, alcoholic drinks, and beverages that a client can buy in the venue;

- the division of space and the principles of its use.³ A new female worker should familiarize herself with what the rooms are like and what equipment is available there which is intended for meetings with the clients;

³ The space of each venue can be divided into that *available* for all guests (*the lounge*), *restricted* only for agency's workers (social room/s), as well as *circumstantially restricted* (rooms for

- the principles for arranging meetings with clients (more in Chapter 4);
- the principles for working with a client (this refers mostly to *the beginning* female workers).

Another area that *the novice* gradually becomes familiar with is the principles that are meant to guarantee the fair distribution of additional organizational duties. Formulating and carrying out the principles of *harmonious cooperation* is necessary when faced with sharing the same small space for numerous hours every day/night. As *the boss* usually does not interfere with those relations (cf. Chapter 2), the female workers control each other, imposing sanctions on those who do not follow the *metanorms*. They mostly refer to the principles of keeping order in the common spaces (the kitchen or bathroom) and preparing rooms that require a certain amount of work before and after a meeting with a client.⁴ A female worker should also familiarize herself with the venue's rules of collecting fresh bed linen and handing over the used sheets or towels. She must also learn to judge when the bed linen could be described as "used" (not all venues changed it after each client).

The described *introductory actions* cover the basic information that allows *the new* to function in a given venue, considering the organizational aspect. They are very important for *the beginners*, for whom the role of a female worker and co-worker is not clear (cf. Oyster 2002: 30). This information can be communicated relatively quickly, usually in the form of short *instructions*, provoked by specific questions asked by *the new*, as well as *corrective instructions*, when a female worker makes a mistake regarding the organization of work. These errors often trigger tensions and conflicts because they can directly or indirectly impact the earning opportunities of the other female workers.

In the case of the researched venues, *the introductory actions* were carried out in the *context of distrust* towards the new female workers. This lack of trust was

meetings with clients). The status of the rooms is especially interesting – even if there is a meeting with a client taking place at a given moment in a room, other people can also enter (another female worker, another client), if this is what the client wishes, or against his will (security workers). Also, when a room is where one of female workers lives, it does not need to mean that it is restricted only for her. It can be utilized for client meetings by its resident but also other female workers. As a result, the space changes its meanings and intended use along with dramaturgic requirements. Therefore, each room in the agency can play a front stage or a back stage role regarding the situational context (cf. Goffman 2000: 153), e.g., a room is a front stage during an interaction with the client, but considered back stage when the female worker makes use of her time between meetings to rest; a social room can play the role of a back stage where she prepares to interact with the clients, or of a front stage for performances between female co-workers, etc.

⁴ A principle is to *clean up* the room and all of its elements after the meetings, so they do not look like they have just been used. Violation of this principle (especially during days and hours of increased *traffic*) is a frequent source of conflicts between the female co-workers, as it disturbs the dramaturgical order of the performance *in the room*.

shown in perceiving them as potential thieves until their behavior proved that this assumption was wrong. The thefts that took place (somewhat incidentally) in the researched venues were supported by some structural factors: the high turnover of workers, no information that would verify the identity of *the new*, the lack of adequate places for the female workers to store their money and personal belongings, as well as weak supervision over what happens in the women's communal area. All of this meant that thefts of items belonging to the female co-workers were usually left without anyone being found guilty or being punished. The first suspect was usually *the new*:

Some new girls that came here took cigarettes or condoms, or stole the towels. Every girl accused the other, as no one caught anybody red-handed [...] But it also pissed people off, because if someone wasn't earning anything, for example, and the condoms cost eight zlotys, when someone takes the whole pack and then you come to work and there's nothing, it's a little annoying. Because you don't know who. One girl looks at the other one and suspects her, but you still don't know anything. [...] I don't suspect those older ones of stealing, only the younger ones who come and go. And then she leaves, and no one has any address or phone number, so she goes away and that's it. [R46]

In such a situation, sex workers try to prevent such behavior through, e.g., *warning stories* told among the group of co-workers, when the topics are female thieves and techniques they make use of. Those are intended to sensitize the other female workers to what can be stolen, and how such a theft is probably carried out. The new female workers are presented there as "black characters", who destroy the order developed in a given venue, and introduce an element of threat:

I have a key. Everything is locked in the cabinet. I mean nothing has been stolen yet, but now we have this new girl, and I can't trust her, I lock everything. I lock it to protect my things from her, because she never has anything, she borrows everything from the girls, she borrows cigarettes from the girls all the time, she would borrow everything, she never has anything of her own. So, I'd rather lock up my things. When you have your money, your ID, everything there, and the key is with you, I can be calm. [R9]

Attempts to borrow (anything) by *the new* are perceived by other female workers as an indication of her poor financial situation, i.e., an element that increases the risk that she will commit theft.

Another reason for the reluctance towards the new female worker who asks favors is also the uncertainty of whether such an investment ever pays back. When it comes to the researched environment, the support (borrowing cosmetics, condoms, cigarettes, coffee or tea, money, but also, e.g., support in interactions with clients) was in the form of exchanging favors following the mutuality principle

(Cialdini 2003). A lack of mutual trust means that the parties that enter such interactions count on their quick reciprocation or settlement of accounts in another way. Violating these rules leads to conflict (Cialdini 2003: 48), which may even result in the need to leave the venue. However, for a new female worker, the threat of group sanctions does not need to pose a strong deterrent factor. Hence, there is some risk that before the new female worker repays the favor or pays off the loan, she will already be gone from the agency, as she can leave the venue whenever she likes. Having dealings with her is thus perceived as risky:

I'm telling you, she was weird [about a new female worker – note by I.Ś.]. I smoke, and she also annoyed me [...] Because she's there, like I am, she earns the same money, the same everything, but, "give me a cigarette, give me a cigarette, you have coffee, you have that?" And she says to me, "shall we have a coffee?" And I said, "but do you have any coffee?" [viciously] So that was that. Because I'm not here to earn FOR HER, on my own ass, if you'll pardon the expression, but FOR ME, right? So, I got pissed off, because I'm not saying, you can once because you're short of money or something, but it's like, the girls give it back later. I smoked five cigarettes from you, so here you are, five. Or if I took some coffee, so now take the coffee back, it's like that, not that you take from everyone while hiding your own. I didn't come here to earn for her, but for me. It's enough that I worked for that one guy for 11 years, and I don't have anything. [R48]

This distrust towards the new female workers has some serious consequences for the group life, as trust is recognized as the vital foundation of fruitful cooperation (Fukuyama 1997; Walczak-Duraj 2006b; Sztompka 2007; Adams, Galanes 2008: 209). Suspiciousness makes establishing mutuality and interdependence – which would provide the basis for bonds between the female workers and the development of a stable group – much harder (Doliński 2000: 51; Cialdini 2003). The *context of distrust* in the researched venues meant that female workers with longer experience did not feel obliged to help *the new* to adapt in the agency. It was *the new* who needed to take an active role, even if she encountered neutrality or hostility. She should somehow “work for” (thus breaking the *context of distrust*) the possibility to establish closer relations with the other female workers with her own behavior. Therefore, the *minimum involvement strategy* hinders the process of becoming socialized to the work and principles applicable in the venue, meaning that the first days (or sometimes weeks) at a new place are a difficult period from the perspective of a new female worker. As I have already mentioned, the *new beginning* female workers are treated in a slightly warmer manner. They can count on a more (but not too intensively) individualized and personal approach from their colleagues, as well as certain care about how they deal with their first interactions with the clients (cf. subchapter 3.3.). However, the help and potential support are of a conditional character. How much help they get usually drops drastically as the new female worker's popularity among the clients increases:

The girls try to introduce the new one, but when she copes, earns good money, then they don't try so hard anymore. They help at the beginning, and everything, but it's not so nice later. [R34]

The *minimum involvement strategy* usually does not refer to women who are introduced to the organization by a person who works there, especially if she occupies a higher position in the group hierarchy. In such a situation, *the new* usually enters into a network of *pragmatic alliances*, bypassing the previous stages, but she can go back to them (especially to the phase of *hostile actions*) if she fails to meet the group's standards.

3.2.3. Hostile actions

Hostile actions can precede, emerge instead of, or take place after the stage of *minimum involvement*. If, as a result of the following, the female worker is defined as threatening the *status quo* which exists in the venue, there might be some degrading or discouraging actions undertaken towards her:

- the process of *positioning the new* female worker regarding her erotic capital (above all, if it is definitely higher or lower than that of the other female workers);
- information collected during the *reconstruction of the biography*;
- the new female worker shows an *exclusive* attitude and
- violating *metanorms* related to cooperation.

Therefore, the *hostile actions* are an expression of continuously constructing and reorganizing the workgroup, forced by the appearance of the new female worker. This situation is perceived by the other female workers as a zero-sum conflict, that the benefit for one side (i.e. the new female worker staying in the venue) is the loss for the other (Goffman, 1969: 101; Aronson et al. 1997: 387). The *hostile actions* are intended to dissolve the conflict by getting rid of the new female worker, or by forcing her to accept the group norms and to *adjust* herself. Hence, the use of those actions is an expression of the difficulties that an individual can have with adapting to the group (Oyster 2002: 98).

Hostile actions are carried out using different strategies. One of them is *non-verbal hostility communications*, which took the following forms in the researched venues:

- *hostile inspection*, i.e., staring at the new female worker openly, intrusively, hatefully, to undermine her self-esteem, trigger anxiety, and to show “who's the boss” here:

You know what, they look at you, damn, what you look like, how bandy your legs are. I had this horrible impression that they'd destroy me with those eyes in a moment. [R43]

This strategy is executed towards the new female workers within the first days of their work, and it is related to the process of estimating their erotic capital. It is often accompanied by

– *isolation*, which is intended to alienate *the novice* and exclude her from the team. It consists in not responding to her attempts to initiate communication, limiting or avoiding any eye contact and treating her as “a non-person” (Goffman 2000: 179):

She [one of the female workers – note by I.Š.] sometimes just sits there, doesn’t talk to me, as if I wasn’t there. [R34]

They just look. They say nothing, but when I say anything, they just look at me like that, right? So, the atmosphere is unpleasant, I lay all evening in the room yesterday, because I didn’t want to go to them. The girls from the day shift are all right, they welcomed me well, but those from the night shift. It’s sometimes like... like a kind of mistreatment. [R14]

Those actions, experienced very intensely by the new female workers, were complemented with *verbal hostility communications*, in the form of:

– *discouragement*, employed towards the new female workers who adopted the *inclusive* pattern of relations with the female workers. However, regarding the result of *positioning*, they were perceived as strong competition that should be *removed* from the venue. This strategy was carried out by lacing seemingly kind conversations with some comments presenting the agency in the worst light possible (e.g. stressing the minor interest of clients, the poor location, the limited possibilities to earn, the *oppressive boss*, etc.). Therefore, a reasonable solution for *the novice* was to listen to that “good” advice from the more experienced female workers, and to change the venue as quickly as possible;

– *teasing* or *criticizing*, expressed with varying degrees of aggression – from mean comments on their appearance to some vulgar epithets and invectives based on information collected during the *reconstruction of the biography* of the new female worker:

And when I was entering the venue, one of them said to me, “what kind of a mother are you, you whore, when your child is in an orphanage” [bitterly]. So, you don’t have any friends at the agency. That’s what I think. I would never trust any girl in the agency [...] You know, when a girl says to me, “get the fuck out of here, what kind of a mother are you,” it was on the tip of my tongue, but I’m the kind of person that would rather just take it, I don’t like arguing, I never attack anyone. And I was about to say: “so you say what kind of a mother I am? And you had an abortion, for me you’re trash, not a girl at all”. [R21]

The teasing usually triggers a rapid emotional response from the new female worker, leading to an escalation of the conflict, especially when *the boss* does not intervene.

A final form of *hostile actions*, much more aggressive than *the non-verbal and verbal hostility communications*, is *dirty rivalry*. It is composed of various actions that are intended to degrade the new female worker, lead her to lose face (Goffman 2006: 10–11), and to undermine her feeling of security. As a consequence, she would eventually leave the venue. Attacks on a female worker can be in the form of:

– *pranks*, i.e., (often permanently) destroying or stealing clothes, shoes, cosmetics, but also undertaking actions that violate the physical integrity of the female workers:

I once heard that they poured some glue in that girl's shoes. And in that previous place, they put some bleach in the girl's lipstick. She already has big and red lips, but when she put the lipstick on, I think she realized quite quickly, but they were very red! She went home immediately. [R33]

The targets of those attacks are usually those attributes or skills of the female worker that give her a competitive advantage over the others. Especially painful (and effective from the perspective of the perpetrators) are those actions that are related to ridiculing a female worker in the clients' presence:

There was this new girl that came to us, and she pole danced very nicely, and because of that, they put some butter on that pole. So, she took hold of the pole and hit the ground. [R34]

– *intimidation*, which is an aggressive form of *discouraging* and is another step on the route to intensifying the *hostile actions* towards the female co-worker. It can be carried out individually by one female worker who feels especially threatened by the appearance of *the new*. However, it is often the result of group actions undertaken by more female workers, who develop a *threatening atmosphere*, above all, of physical threats, by carrying out specific *performances*:

That stupid bitch could get those girls to do what she wanted, so they pretended to fight in the kitchen, and yelled: "fuck it, I'm gonna take another one into the kitchen and beat her up." You know, beating them with some pots. And I was so afraid, but those girls told me after some time – because only they were like that to me, the others were all right, I must say – they told me after some time that it wasn't like that, they had just taken some spoons and a pot, and they were hitting it. And you know, I just heard the sound, and it was very loud. [R23]

– *provocations*, intended to undermine *the reputation* of the attacked female worker and cause her *dismissal*. This action requires third parties to become involved in the game (*the boss*, security workers/bartenders, clients), and to convince them to the arguments presented by the "ringleader". The developed *provocations* were mostly based on accusations of improper treatment of clients, confirmed by their supposed complaints; violation of the group's cooperation principles and not

sharing duties; abuse of psychoactive substances; diseases but also too low erotic capital (appearance, age, weight) that would be to the detriment of the venue's image and may reflect in a decrease of its popularity and some financial loss. In the researched agencies, the *provocations* were developed individually by a single female worker, by a group of co-workers, or even teams composed of female workers and some clients they were acquainted with. They were usually based on real situations, presented in an appropriate light:

K. was an alcoholic. A young girl, you know, maybe 25 years old? It happened that she came in and tripped in the lounge. So, I went to the security guys and said: "listen, there are guys in suits here, so it's not right." So, they came, took her by the hand downstairs and said "go to sleep woman." Then she was dismissed, removed from work because of the alcohol, because the bosses didn't like her behavior either. [R32]

However, in some cases, *the provocations* were based on fictional breaches and fabricated "evidence." If the stories were skillfully exaggerated by the female co-workers, they might turn into the basis for *dismissing the new*:

For example, they did something like when I came out of the room and I had made the bed, they took the bedspread off and then tried to make me believe that I was the one who did it. And they went to the security guy and said that I didn't clean the room. Or they could throw a condom out of a bin to make it look like I didn't clean up. [R23]

To achieve a set goal, there was often the need to employ a series of *provocations*, repeated at certain time intervals. As a result of those intensified actions, the female workers who could not bear the tension, used to leave the venue on their own. In some situations, they were *dismissed* by *the boss*, who succumbed to the pressures from the other female workers, not even verifying whether the accusations had any basis in fact:

Angry M., the new girl, was sitting in the room. She yelled and threatened the others and moaned in turns. She talked about the previous night when the girls hadn't allowed her to go to the lounge, they locked her in the room, and threw her out of the venue before midnight. The security guy didn't react. So, she came earlier today to have a face-to-face conversation with the boss and deny the accusations made by others: that she doesn't use condoms, the clients complain about her hygiene, and the girls suspect that she has some venereal infections. She explained for more than minutes that the reason for their behavior is jealousy and concerns that they may lose clients. She spoke a lot about her reputation in other venues and satisfied regular clients. When she went to talk to the boss, I went to the girls to the social. And they put it shortly – they wouldn't work with her, and the boss would dismiss her for sure. [...] When I was leaving home, I went to see W. [a security worker – note by I.Š.] and asked how the conversation went between M. and the boss. He smiled and said that she's not here anymore, and that she wouldn't make any money here anyway [observation].

– *mean exposure*, especially dangerous for women who hide the fact of providing sex services from their relatives. It involves making use of the knowledge about a given female worker, collected during the *reconstruction* of her *biography*, to cause problems in her private life (e.g. making an anonymous call to her partner or family members, and inform them that the woman works in an agency, sending a picture message with a compromising image), and thus forcing her to leave the venue. It is an effective manner of fighting their rivals, although the costs suffered by the attacked female worker are high. I did not observe such actions during the research; however, they were a frequent motif in *the warning stories*. The female workers make use of them to warn each other of any hazards related to the work, and to communicate an important principle, i.e., “do not trust anyone,” as everything you say can be used against you in a conflict situation:

I’m quite a closed person, I don’t open up too much. Because I heard that one girl called the home of another one and told them everything. There are these rats here, like everywhere. [R29]

– *physical violence* – the emotional tension that accompanies the described *hostile actions* may be channeled in episodes of physical violence that can become arguments and fights within the group of female co-workers. In some cases, they were triggered by psychoactive substances that the initiators of the conflict were under the influence of. These situations were quite frequent in the researched venues, although not very intense:

J: A. and D. exchanged some blows yesterday.

I: But what was it about?

J: Just that they didn’t like each other. They teased one another all the time, so they exchanged blows. A. was really stoned, and you could see that, because she was pissed off all the time, and she just flung open the doors and said, “where’s D.?” [imitating her angry voice], and they start pulling each other, and I was in the room then, sleeping, and there was this other girl with me, and they woke us up, it was so loud [laughter], so I’m like: “Jesus, shut the fuck up, stop fighting.” I always try to take things peacefully, but I told A. not to fight, and she was like, “you stupid old cunt!”, that kind of stuff. [observation]

3.2.3.1. Conditions influencing the course of *hostile actions*

The above-mentioned *hostile actions* are undertaken mostly in relation to *the novices*. However, they may also be performed towards female workers with some experience, if they pointedly violate the group norms. In such cases, they usually of a milder form (e.g. *teasing*).

There are several factors that influence which *hostile actions* will emerge and how intense they will be in a given agency. Mostly, it is the venue’s management

style. The described actions (especially the more aggressive ones) took place most of all in the agencies of a more *oppressive* management style and those *based on fraternization*. Their *bosses* followed a rule that whatever happens among the female workers is their business. When it comes to venues of a *distanced* or *kind professionalism*, the *bosses* usually did not allow the *hostile actions* or eliminated them almost as soon as they began (e.g. through a system of penalties for all participants). From their perspective, these actions threatened the venue's *reputation*⁵ among clients and potential future female workers. They also contributed to some financial losses and the fluctuation of workers. Whether *the hostile actions* (e.g. *provocations*) bring the expected result or not depends on *the boss*' attitude to a great extent:

[A female worker describes the adopted *provocations* – note by I.Š.] Eventually, either she leaves herself or you approach the boss in such a manner that HE is the one who dismisses her, but it doesn't mean he will do that, because if a girl earns money, it's obvious, she also earns for him. So, it depends on the boss, whether he thinks logically. Because if he's intelligent, he won't get caught up in such manipulations. [R36]

The intensification of the *hostile actions* was differentiated in relation to the structure of the group of female workers. The recipients of the most intense actions were *the beginners* whom no one attempted to develop any bonds with, and whom many saw as a threat to the existing relations. It is hard to apply *hostile actions* towards female workers with longer experience, regarding their position in the group and any potential common interests. They are also not undertaken towards *the new* introduced to the venue by the women who already work there, especially if they occupy a high position within the organizational hierarchy. Intensification of *the hostile actions* is also related to the number of female workers in the venue. These actions seem to be typical for larger agencies with informal groups (cliques) (Doktór 1964), with the leader showing a negative attitude towards *the new*:

You know, there were these two really mean girls, and the third one was the ringleader, she looked like she did nothing herself, but she egged them on. She was supposedly nice to me all the time, she smiled and everything, but I knew that she was the one egging them on [...] Look, there can be so many girls, but one ringleader is enough, they are so stupid. [R23]

It is worth stressing that these groups were not necessarily of a permanent character. They emerged and became coherent in the researched venues in the

⁵ Not to provoke any conflicts with *the boss*, the norm regulating the female workers undertaking *hostile actions* is limiting their range to the backstage, and not allowing a situation when they are transferred to *the lounge*. It should remain a place for a harmonious and team *performance* (cf. Chapter 4).

face of a common enemy (cf. Aronson et al. 1997). When the female co-worker who was the object of these actions left, the relations between the members of the clique usually relaxed as well.

The hostile actions took various forms, depending on the level of experience a particular woman had in the agency. It was often the case that the most reluctant towards *the new* were those colleagues who had just been *novices* themselves, seeing her as a threat to their position. In turn, women who frequently found themselves on both sides of the interaction (both as *the new* and as a female worker in the venue where *the new* came), were able to assess the situation with a greater distance and see its positives. A new female worker does not always mean a financial loss; it is not automatic. On the contrary, she may attract new clients, which the other women, and the venue as a whole, can take advantage of:

We're already a tightly-knit team here, you know, we actually welcome all girls as kindly as we can, because if we were the same for the whole five years, those clients would eventually stop coming. [...] Men like to change. [R20]

The rivalry and, thus, *the hostile actions*, were of different intensity when it came to the popularity of the venue among clients and the earning probability anticipated by the female workers. When *the traffic* is high, a greater number of women have a chance to get a client; hence, they less often decide to make use of *hostile actions*. However, when the interest in the venue is low, another female worker, especially with a higher erotic capital, poses a threat and stimulates rivalry for the limited resources.

3.2.3.2. Strategies of the new female workers towards *hostile actions*

It is worth noticing that new female workers are not completely defenseless towards *the hostile actions*. One strategy of coping with them is to *leave the venue* and find employment in another one, where the work is performed in a nicer atmosphere. As a result, the group structure remains untouched, and it is even strengthened in some cases. However, from the venue's perspective, it means losing some potentially valuable female workers and a disadvantageous increase in fluctuation.

If a new female worker decides to remain in the agency, she adopts a *survival strategy*. This path is taken especially by those new female workers who are *continuing* their involvement in prostitution and have only changed venue. Thanks to their previous experiences, they are aware of the kind of welcome they can expect in the new place and are capable of distancing themselves from it.

The survival strategies include the *search for allies* among *the bosses* and security workers. This action is undertaken by the female workers who, regarding

their good relationship with *the boss*, can count on his interest and intervention in case the *hostile actions* escalate. Complaining about the female co-workers' behavior usually dampens the aggression towards *the new*, leading to the stage of *pragmatic alliances*.

Another strategy is to *search for allies among the female co-workers*, by adopting the *inclusive* patterns in establishing relationships, but also undertaking *protective actions* in advance, e.g., *group migration* or seeking a venue where some acquaintances work. Starting work in a new agency not alone, but in dyads or larger groups, makes the female workers less emotionally dependent on their new colleagues. They can support each other during the first difficult period. They also find it easier to face any potential rejection or *hostile actions*:

It's easier to come to a new place together; if we are coming to a new place, we don't feel so inhibited. If they don't like us, they don't, but because we work together, that's enough. We won't let them destroy us so quickly. [R36]

Furthermore, *group migration* raises the opportunity that at least one of the members will know someone (a female worker, a security worker) in the new agency. It is very beneficial to start working in a venue where an acquaintance already works, especially when this person's position in the organizational structure is high. Therefore, *the new* borrows her prestige and position, to some extent, at the same time making use of her care. Hence, the adaptation period can be shorter, and the process may be less harsh:

Because we know W., the others welcomed us totally normally, they didn't make us feel worse, there was no competition, nothing. They welcomed us well, there was no problem at all. [R28]

Another type of *survival strategy* is *demonstrating neutrality towards hostile actions* undertaken by the female co-workers. Through tenacity and apparent indifference, *the new* demonstrates her determination to work in a given venue. If she is able to make it through the hardest moment, *the hostile actions* will stop after some time, and she will become accepted by her colleagues, thanks to her resistance to teasing:

I had a very sad beginning HERE, but there were other girls then. Very upsetting girls. They thought I would go. They did everything so I'd leave of my own accord, but as this was not my first agency, I knew it wouldn't be easy at the beginning [...] You know, they got pissed off that it didn't work, everything they did, I just sat and read a book. Because I thought there was no point, if they tease me, what can I talk about with them? So, I brought books, I sat down, I read them, because what could I talk with them about if they did all of that? And they were so pissed off. But you know, it took a month, a month and a half at most, and they saw that they could do

nothing, because I just... I came to work at the same time, I did my job, I left, and you know, they let it go. [R23]

Having an emotional distance from *the hostile actions* is necessary to perform this strategy. It can be achieved thanks to the experience obtained in previous venues or the reciprocity of perspectives. It helps *the new* redefine the reasons for their female co-workers' aggressive behavior, interpreting it not as an expression of personal reluctance but as a response to a hazardous situation:

It's like when you come to a new agency, it's really tough at the beginning. Whether the girls will accept you. The girls accepted me here, and it's really nice, but it was very hard at the beginning. They need to accept you, because you're new, so it's obvious that when a new one comes, you also always... you're afraid that a guy will choose her, take her to the room, not me, you know? It's money, rivalry. It's very nice now, a friendly atmosphere. But when you come here at the beginning, some time must pass before you're accepted. [R9]

As a consequence, the interviewees presented a fatalistic attitude of accepting *minimum involvement* and *hostile actions*. They perceived them as a result of the competitive character of agency work, its inevitable elements, another difficulty that they must deal with while working in sex business:

When one girl earns more, or something like that, they want to DESTROY her. Because the girls come from different backgrounds, and you can expect ANYTHING. That they'll cut her clothes, destroy her shoes, take clothes from each other, it's normal. Maybe it's not normal, but it can be expected. [R36]

However, working in such conditions comes with a great deal of stress and anxiety. While for *the beginners* it is mainly rooted in interactions with the clients, *the continuing* female workers are usually afraid of whether they will be accepted in this new place. In extreme cases, the atmosphere in the venue can be so stressful that they feel chronic anxiety and threat:

I'm simply afraid, even when I drink, I pour out what's left right away, I leave the glass and I don't drink anymore. Whether its tea or coffee [whispering], you can't trust anyone in this profession. [...] Because one earns more than the other one. Or one girl hasn't earned anything for three days, so you need to come up with something so that the one earning the most... maybe do something to her, right? [R51]

The described *hostile actions* can be compared to initiation practices related to the introduction of a new person into a group with an existing hierarchy, level of solidarity and set of standards (Konecki 2007). However, it seems that in the case of escort agencies, the negative processes related to that period can be intensified by the specific features of the organizational culture, e.g., the consent to norms

and principles being violated, frequent incidents of aggression among organizational members (perceived as “inevitable”), as well as the feeling of the impunity of its perpetrators. Many of those actions bear some features of intimidation, or harassment at work (Zapf 1999; Chomczyński 2008). On the other hand, the interviewees broadly believed that:

It is characteristic of this job that, you know, the boss won't have only normal girls, right? Or he won't get rid of them, because it's his business, and I get it. [R38]

Hence, it is necessary to accept the unique characteristics of this workplace and the relations between the employees to remain in the escort agency. Eventually, both the female workers who form the *core of the team* and *the new* ones who are willing to stay there, must – despite the rivalry and mutual reluctance – develop some principles of cooperation. It is possible through *pragmatic acceptance*.

3.2.4. Pragmatic acceptance

The term *pragmatic acceptance* serves to describe a relation of conditional acceptance of *the new* by other female workers (and vice versa). It means a ceasefire, with a reservation that it is possible to return to the *hostile actions* at any time, if *the new* breaks the *metanorms* that determine the principles of cooperation. At this stage of relation development, coherence and a sense of belonging and mutual attachment remain weak. This results from the low level of satisfaction from being a member of the group (Adams, Galanes 2008: 211). However, *pragmatic acceptance* is not founded on emotional involvement, but rather in coming in terms with the fact that the agency work means teamwork. Hence, there is a need to develop and maintain a relationship that would allow the women to share the space and work together *in the lounge* (and often also *in the room*). To make it happen, it is necessary to develop ways of dealing with one's own emotions related to the competitive actions undertaken by the female co-workers. Therefore, despite the fact that the agency workers – if they were provided with similar conditions (e.g. safety, infrastructure) – would prefer to work independently or in a much smaller group, they are forced to cooperate with each other while they remain in the escort agency. On the other hand, when the group relations are properly arranged, the use of positive aspects of the teamwork gives them a chance to maximize their profits.

Therefore, shifting to the stage of *pragmatic acceptance* means redefining the new female worker's presence in the agency. The zero-sum game becomes a mixed motive game, where both parties (i.e. *the new* and the other female workers) can benefit if they are capable of cooperating with each other, although thanks to a competitive attitude, one party would benefit even more (Aronson et al. 1997:

388). This means that the female workers need to continuously develop and monitor the cooperation principles and situational choices between rivalry or cooperation. Hence, *pragmatic acceptance* is maintained step by step, in the everyday interactions at the workplace. One strategy to achieve it is to *control rivalry* by determining the principles that equalize the chances of female workers when dealing with clients. Others strategies include establishing *pragmatic alliances*, *maintaining a kind, professional relationship*, *managing negative emotions* and *professional solidarity*.

3.2.4.1. Rivalry control strategies

An important area of control was the manner in which women prepare their body and outfit for work. It is important for the venue's *reputation* that all female workers are "well-dressed" (which influences the opinions of clients and may reflect in their interest in the venue, cf. Chapter 4). At the same time, no female worker should look "too good", as this could distort the balance that has been worked out within the group. Therefore, a new female worker must adjust her image to the level accepted by her female co-workers, otherwise, she might experience some *hostile actions* in the form of *pranks*. On the other hand, taking care of the appropriate appearance of female co-workers also means the need to provide some advice to *the beginners*, who usually do not know how they should dress or what make-up they should wear. They often base their ideas about it on movies or TV series, which do not always correspond to the reality of contemporary Polish escort agencies. Therefore, *the beginning* female workers often differ from the others with their outfit and make-up. This is particularly true if the decision to get involved in prostitution was caused by financial problems, and they do not have enough money to get ready for work:

So, the first time, I wore an ordinary dress and high-heels. I looked really poor when compared to my colleagues. A CINDERELLA. But then I began to look a little like how the girls dress here. [R51]

Observing their female co-workers, copying elements of their style, but also accepting their comments and advice regarding the outfit, haircuts, and make-up, and how they prepare their body for work, all provide an element of professional socialization for the new female worker. They are also significant in terms of forming bonds. They are often one of the few topics of conversation that bring them joy and allow them to get away from reality, especially since for many of the women, *investing* in their own appearance was not previously achievable because of their financial situation. On the other hand, however, treating shopping or beauty routines as a way to compensate or comfort themselves after the burdens of working in the agency can mean that these actions become compulsive.

Within the scope of *rivalry control*, the female co-workers also determined the principles of work *in the lounge*, i.e., the organization of the process of getting a client. It covers a rivalry course that is acceptable in a given venue, as well as sanctions for its violation. Therefore, even though the managers of a given venue impose a certain structure on the interactions *in the lounge*, their specificity in each venue results mainly from the *metanorms* developed and maintained by the group of female workers.

When it comes to the researched venues, the interactions with clients *in the lounge* took place in accordance with one of two strategies: *equalization* or *maximization of opportunities*. The *equal opportunities principle* minimizes the individualized goals of the female workers, the differences in their outfits, their behavior, or even when they *go out to the lounge* (no female worker can go out earlier and meet the clients, as this would give her an advantage over the others). This provides all workers with the same opportunities to *get a client* (cf. Heyl 1977). Hence, the choice made by the client results only (as perceived by the sex workers) from his own preferences, and it cannot be a reason for jealousy or conflict. In turn, the *maximization of opportunities strategy* assumes that there is no hold barred when it comes to getting a client. Getting an advantage over the female co-workers is usually achieved through the appropriate outfit, actions, touch, gestures, and words (cf. Chapter 4). This strategy does not contribute to the development of an integrated team of workers, but it may bring higher profits to those female workers who adopt it.

Both strategies, in their extreme versions, exert a negative influence on the female workers' earnings. The *equalization of opportunities strategy* may lead to a group conformism that emerges in the female workers not undertaking any actions that would attract the client's attention, as they are afraid of conflict with the colleagues. Such situations took place in small teams of female workers (often older ones), who had worked together for a longer time. By *equalizing the opportunities*, they determined *fair* work principles, providing more harmonious relations, but potentially also lower profits. The second strategy was more typical for teams composed of younger female workers who treated prostitution (among other things) as a verification of their attractiveness, measured by the level of earnings. The high fluctuation of female workers was typical for the venues which adopted that strategy. Although it is more profitable, this strategy can generate more conflicts:

You know, in that agency, one girl would be in there like a flash straight after another girl, and if she could, she would seize that client from her. It's really tragic. The girls just can't cooperate with each other. They think that if one of them earns, she must be earning from the first minute to the last, just so the others don't have anything. It's this kind of competition that makes the atmosphere tragic, and I simply don't feel good in such a situation, because it's not a job for me – the stress, the nerves, you

know? It's simply a nightmare. And there's nothing like that here. It's like, a client comes, we go out to the lounge, the client chooses, no one has any grievances against the other. No, because there will be another client, and another girl will earn. So here, it's not like I have to earn and you shouldn't. It's equal, and it's not like they are at each other's throats. For example, if I know that I made some money and that it's enough, so, when a client comes, I don't go to the lounge anymore because I know I've already made some money. If I don't go out, he can choose another girl. So, you can say that I give this client away to another girl. And she can earn some money then. [R35]

The principles of work *in the lounge* also pose an element of female workers selection. If a woman feels bad in a given strategy, and she cannot cope within it, she will leave for an agency where the rules are more similar to her vision of a sex worker's role.

Rivalry control also takes place through *setting prices for the clients*. It is intended to minimize the significance of price as a competitive advantage. Therefore, all female workers in a given venue should offer the same price list for additional sex services and the same set of "standard" actions (cf. Heyl 1977). This element of the *rivalry control* strategy is the hardest to monitor. A transaction with a man who visits the agency usually takes place in private, providing the female worker with an opportunity to offer potential discounts. However, according to my interviewees, it is the clients who are the most reliable source of information about the price list that the female workers actually adopt. During meetings with other female workers, they can reveal the details of financial arrangements from the past, counting on similar discounts. It is interesting that if the declarations of both parties were contradictory, it was the client's word that the female workers took as being more reliable.

An important issue is also the requirement for all female workers to use condoms (regardless of the hormonal means of contraception that they use) in the case of each commercial act of sexual intercourse. This principle is rooted in HIV prevention understood not only as an individual issue of the female worker, but also as a matter that is important for the health of the whole team. The introduction of these requirements is also intended to limit unfair competition, as the women who agree to have unprotected sex have more clients, according to the interviewees.

3.2.4.2. Pragmatic alliances

Apart from the *rivalry control* strategy, *pragmatic alliances*, established between particular female workers, are an important element that helps maintain the *pragmatic acceptance*. They are based on a principle of mutuality in the provision of aid and the fulfillment of certain needs. Therefore, to make them possible, there

is a need for at least a modicum of trust that a given female worker will not leave the venue before she returns the favors within the *alliance*, and that she will have the chance to do this (taking into consideration her position in the venue or her erotic capital). Hence, the *alliances* last until each party can and wants to return the favors, but at the same time not feeling abused.

The dominant form⁶ of these *alliances* is *drawing another girl into the room*, i.e., encouraging a client to choose two instead of just one female worker (i.e. a *threesome*). This kind of interaction is advantageous for the female workers, as each of them takes care of the client virtually for half of the paid time but receives the full amount. The client is usually encouraged to *draw* a particular female worker, bound by *the alliance*:

We can earn more together than one girl. Because when one girl recommends the other, it's a chance to meet in a threesome, i.e., two girls and one guy. When the girls get along well, everything flows beautifully, so we're less tired and we still make money. When the girls are nice, it's always like one will take the other. [R36]

The alliances are established between the female workers who have a similar vision of work in the agency and who support each other in carrying it out. A relatively permanent arrangement of *alliances* also stabilizes the *work situation*, unifying the female workers' behavior, as violation of the *alliance* can bring intense and measurable consequences. The relations where an *ally* becomes an *organizational significant other* for the new female worker (cf. *role-specific significant other*; Denzin 1972; Ziółkowski 1981: 74; Konecki 2007: 47) also offer a more advantageous environment for *the professional socialization to sex work*. When *the new* starts to make *alliances* with the female workers, this means that the liminal period between the status of a stranger and a fully-fledged participant of the organization comes to an end (cf. Konecki 2007: 52).

3.2.4.3. Maintaining polite neutrality

Maintaining *pragmatic acceptance* also requires the women to preserve a safe relationship that is not too close, meaning *polite neutrality*. According to my interviewees, a strong emotional bond between female co-workers in the agency is neither frequent nor much desired. It does not mean that such relationships do not happen. Many of my interviewees had some experience with *agency friendship*, but a “model” relationship should be characterized by a certain distance, as they say:

⁶ But it is not the only form – *pragmatic alliances* can also pertain to exchange of various services.

The atmosphere here is rather neutral, we, we [pause] we act rather neutrally. It's obvious that we laugh, talk, but I haven't seen one girl be friends with another. They may like each other more, but no, there are no friendships here. [R41]

Maintaining appropriate relationships is hard in the dynamic and temperamental atmosphere of the agency. It requires the women to demonstrate kindness (or at least neutrality) towards their female co-workers during the long hours of waiting for clients, taking part in conversations, gossiping, small intrigues in the agency. At the same time, it is extremely important to avoid conflicts (both as a direct participant, as well as a mediator in disputes between others), and not to undertake actions that could be interpreted as *hostile*:

I don't have any arguments with the girls. Those who drink or something, they have their own world. I don't meddle, I don't get involved, I just avoid them, so they don't feel that I think bad about them, or treat them worse than my other colleagues. I just take it easy, fun, it should be like that. [...] And if they have any problems between them, I don't take sides, I always try to stay neutral, I always say: "it's your problem, solve it on your own and don't drag me into it, because I like you both," and that's it then, because no one bothers me. "Didn't you see this or that?" And I say: "I won't rat, I like both, you and her." And it's the best solution as no one has any grievances then, no one talks about me behind my back, it's the best, not to provoke any incidents that are pointless, senseless, because I think that we all come here to earn some money, and we should stick together, cooperate, to shake the money out of this guy. [R32]

3.2.4.4. *The management of negative emotions*

Preserving the *pragmatic acceptance* also requires monitoring of the negative emotions that are revealed towards the female workers. This means the need to suppress or at least hide those emotions that might threaten the performance or group relations. Therefore, these feelings become a subject of emotional labor as understood by Hochschild (2009). As a result, jealousy may become a taboo topic:

Here, at our place, when it comes to the night shift, there's really none. I don't know if there's any jealousy, but no one shows it for sure. [R28]

There are girls who are jealous, but they keep it inside, they don't speak about it – that one girl looks better, for example, that one earns better, another one has more regular clients, for example. Every girl thinks something about another one quietly, and they don't usually talk about it. [R19]

The researched women developed a series of rationalizations that allow them to deal (individually and in a group) with suppressed jealousy towards the

co-workers. One of them is a complete shift of agency (thus, also the responsibility and guilt) for the fact that the woman was chosen by the client (cf. Hochschild 2009). The belief that “it is the client who makes the choice” or “you never know who the client will choose here ” allow the women *not to see* the individual efforts made by a female worker which might influence her being chosen, or which she could be blamed for:

There’s no envy. At least here, for sure. There was this girl, and I told her once, “listen, the fact that you’re selected, it’s your money. Why should I hold it against you?” And those girls do. But me, I never usually feel this, because it’s luck, this one will be selected, that one will be selected, so why would I not like a girl? When she’s good and kind to me, why wouldn’t I like her? [R34]

Dealing with jealousy (or rather hiding it) also tends to be interpreted as an asset that raises the female worker’s self-esteem: “only those with complexes are jealous.” Thus, suppressing jealousy is evidence of high self-esteem that guarantees a given woman an image advantage over her co-workers:

When it’s already obvious in the lounge who will earn, this one frowns at that one, this one will be jealous, she’ll come to the room and bitch that he chose her again. This jealousy is primitive, because if a girl doesn’t accept herself and thinks she’s someone attractive, she isn’t jealous. She simply isn’t jealous. But if a girl has some complexes, to boost her confidence she needs to be accepted by a man. But me, I’m not jealous, I don’t care if someone chooses me because I know it that I’m not ugly. [R14]

On the other hand, it is not always possible to keep calm, especially when experiencing frustrations or anger. Discharging the emotional load on the client can be dangerous and related to a loss of profit. It is safer (of course, to a certain degree) for the female co-workers *to ride roughshod over each other*. Therefore, they can reduce the level of negative emotions and vitriol backstage so that when the client comes, they can present a friendly and seductive manner. I observed the increased intensity of those actions in the periods of weaker interest in the venue by clients, and thus the worse economic situation of women:

You can argue about everything, about a better outfit, cosmetics, and sometimes the person listening to it laughs because it’s bullshit. To feel better about herself, some girls need to treat someone else worse, as if they’re nothing. [R24]

Because this one is better looking, that one earned more, you know? They gossip a lot when there are no clients, they get really bored and they ride roughshod over each other. You need to be careful who you talk to. [R3]

3.2.4.5. Professional solidarity

Professional solidarity is also a significant factor that allows the women to preserve the *pragmatic acceptance*. It means an *alliance* against *the boss* and the principles he established which were seen as unfair and disadvantageous. *Professional solidarity* is an *in vivo* category that comes from an interview with *the boss* of one of the agencies. According to him, the female workers, despite the arguments and divisions, “give each other solid support”, if they have any interest in that:

They support each other, because when there’s this unity against a client or the boss, then yes, they do support each other. [W2]

Developing and preserving *pragmatic acceptance* means that, despite any rivalry and uncertainty, the negative emotions and risk related to interactions with female co-workers in a given venue, they believe it is advantageous to act together and form a team (even if connected only by weak bonds). The *pragmatic acceptance* can be treated as a tactic for normalizing the *work situation* in the agency, as the appropriate relations with the female co-workers may help them deal with negative consequences of sex work (through conversations, rationalization, etc.).

It’s a bit hard in such a place, but the money does the job, you stop thinking. By the way, the atmosphere is great here, you can sit, talk and laugh. You take this hanger-on to the room, ok, you go in, go out, and it’s nice again, kind, pleasant. Here, it’s not like anyone argues or fights or gossips, no. We are all normal. [R3]

Participating in such a group provides the female workers with a chance to establish interactions with the people who share their interpretation perspective; thus, the agency becomes a kind of “back place” where they do not need to conceal their stigma (cf. Goffman 1963: 81).

There are some great girls, it’s obvious, each one has a different type of character. You can’t fight with each other because we’re all in the same boat, so everyone knows how tough it is. We understand each other. [R41]

3.2.5. Peer groups, emotional relationships and friendships

If women have already cooperated with each other for a relatively long period of time in a given venue, preserving the *pragmatic acceptance* relations, some peer groups start to emerge between them. They have become connected by the

similarity of their situation (age, family situation, place in the organizational hierarchy), kindness or a similar vision of how the agency's work should be organized. Participation in such groups is of crucial significance for *the professional socialization*. This results from the fact that even though the mechanisms of identifying with significant others are not necessary for the anticipatory socialization process to run smoothly, the effectiveness of this process is improved if those mechanisms exist (Berger, Luckmann 1967). From this perspective, the closer, friendly relations between female workers that could be observed in the researched venues are extremely interesting:

Well, in the past we were like, there were three of us [in another agency – note by I.Š.], we met, and we were friends. And then we went together to agency B, we worked there, slept and ate there, we shared bunk beds, and there were these two friends that joined us later, so there were five of us, we were together. And you know, if you're together for so long, as we worked there for two years, two years yet in another place, then you know each other well. And then they were at my wedding reception, as bridesmaids. [R7]

These relationships provided support in the case of conflicts with *the boss*, clients of their female co-workers, and often in the face of difficulties in their private life. However, with hindsight, they were evaluated negatively by my interviewees. The motif that “you don't have any friends here” emerged virtually in all interviews with the more experienced female workers. Examples of relationships that survived through years were presented as a kind of an organizational legend. The experiences of my interviewees suggest that the *agency friendship* usually ends in *betrayal* or a painful disappointment related to the rivalry for clients. In many cases, it also leads to revenge, in the form of the previously described actions of *dirty rivalry*. Former friends can hurt each other very deeply as they have the most complete information about their biographies, and they know their sensitive points. Therefore, friendships were usually established by *novice* female workers, who did not understand the warnings from more experienced colleagues until they found out the truth for themselves. Such relationships were also established by older female workers who did not compete with each other so intensively, but who often expected support, e.g., while *drawing another girl into the room*. The remaining interviewees maintained relations with their female co-workers with full awareness, with a unique *kind semi-distance*:

The work and the money are the most important for me, not any arrangements at work. Because I don't believe in them. Because those friendships usually don't end well [...] I like some girls more and others less. I have this approach that I can go to a party with them, but apart from that, I don't want to get involved in any deeper relations, because I was really disappointed so many times with such friendships. [R14]

3.3. TEAMWORK AND SOCIALIZATION FOR SEX WORK

While considering the relations between female co-workers, attention should also be paid to the actions related to socialization of *the new* to sex work. According to common opinion, prostitution is an occupation that does not require any special skills. However, to be able to conduct meetings with the clients effectively, it is necessary for there to be some form of preparation⁷. The case of escort agencies is interesting as in other contemporary types of prostitution there are not so many group possibilities, or everyday negotiations related to ways of interacting with clients. The women stay together for many hours every day in the venues. Therefore, even if they are not connected by any emotional bonds, and a systematic introduction to the characteristics of the job is lacking, *the beginners* learn the work strategies and techniques, ways of dealing with clients, maximizing profits and taking care of safety, by observing the actions undertaken by their female co-workers. However, the female workers usually provide *the new* with instructions and stories during conversations (cf. Prus, Irini 1988: 28). Those actions were undertaken (with different degrees of intensity) by all the female workers from the researched venues, although in some cases, this role was monopolized by a women with more experience, often already less popular among clients, who based her position in the group on her experiences that she shared with *the novices*. Numerous features of this relationship liken it to coaching, during which a more experienced female worker makes some “predictions” for *the new* about the next actions she must face and whom she will become (Strauss 2013: 99). It was of special significance in the case of *the beginning* female workers, who while having only basic and stereotypical knowledge about prostitution, were not aware of the processes that were obvious to the workers with greater experience.

There are several processes which are especially significant for the adaptation of *the beginning* female worker to sex work.

1) First of all, it involves the process of *nudity normalization and redefinition of the meaning of the body*. The notion of embarrassment and shame regularly emerged in fragments of interviews where the women described their first experiences in the agency (cf. Scheff 1994: 86; Goffman 1963, 2006). It was related both to presenting their bodies and observing their female co-workers’ and clients’ bodies at a personal and intimate distance (Hall 2009). Nudity (but also how the naked body is presented in erotic contexts) was perceived as being reserved for relations with the closest people (cf. Elias 1980, Hall 2009, Morris 1998). It is,

⁷ There is some information in the prostitution history pertaining to schools that prepared young women for this occupation. *Apprenticeship in prostitution* was also conducted in brothels. The roles of teachers were played by more experienced female co-workers or owners of such premises (Bryan 1965; Roberts 1997).

however, something mundane and ordinary in the world of commercial sex services. *The beginning* female worker observes naked or barely dressed female bodies and lack of shame while dressing or performing in front of clients from her very first meetings with the agency's sex workers. From unavailable, covered, often embarrassing areas that can be burdened with complexes, and which reserved for personal relations, intimate body parts must become visible, watched, assessed and touched by strangers. Gradually, as a result of constant exposure, nudity loses its sexual or erotic dimension, it becomes almost invisible and the feeling of shame towards the other participants of the agency's world stops.⁸ What is public and what is private become redefined, and the boundaries of intimacy of a beginning female worker shift. As a result, talking about the body, its assets, infections, physiology, but also reactions during sexual intercourse, is no longer embarrassing. Also, the taboo regarding principles for exposing intimate parts of the body is deconstructed. They are presented to other participants of the agency's world with a decreasing feeling of embarrassment. Skimpy outfits that made the female workers feel awkward at the beginning become a kind of uniform. It has a role similar to a costume that helps an actor play the role, and facilitates the emotional, physical and sex work. However, redefining the meaning of their body, so it can be "made available" to the clients, is a long-lasting process, related to the identity work (Strauss et al. 1985) that must be undertaken by a given female worker. Observations of the actions and *composure stories* from other female workers are extremely significant for its success:

I can say that in this work I've seen so many things that I'm not so ashamed, I don't have it anymore. I used to be very shy, it was very hard for me to get undressed, it was very tough when I started, but I'm not ashamed anymore. I don't know, it's like I showed a hand [laughter] this is what it means for me, it's true [...] And there are also sometimes two girls in the room and one guy, so you need to get over yourself as well. It needs to come on its own. A while ago, a nice girl started working here, she comes from far away, she has large debts, and she comes here for weekends, and she's VERY shy, [...] she sometimes asks me if it was so tough in the room for me, so I tell her, "it will PASS." [R10]

However, it does not mean that the shame disappears completely. It emerges in interactions with specific categories of social actors, e.g., with a client that a given woman finds very attractive, but also with people from outside the agency (e.g. a researcher; Ślęzak 2013a). It may mean that nudity is redefined and normalized only in specific contexts and towards certain categories of social actors.

⁸ The remaining workers (*the boss*, bartenders, security) should also not perceive the female workers' bodies in the erotic context. I also needed to familiarize myself with how my respondents present their bodies (cf. Sanders 2006).

2) Another process that contributes to the female worker's adjustment to sex work is *the normalization of the range of services* that she will provide. For *the beginning* female workers, just the identification of the offered types of services can be the first impulse for the normalization of certain sexual behaviors. Since positions or actions that are commonly placed on the line between of standard sex and deviancy (cf. Izdebski 2012) are listed in the agency as one of the basic services available for clients, the women's perception of these things changes gradually. On the other hand, not all women who started this kind of work were aware of what particular services they would have to provide:

I imagined it differently, frankly speaking. Just sex. Sure, maybe there are some things, but I'd never heard about domination or other things... pissing, not pissing, no I hadn't. I'd never imagined anything like that. Just sex and nothing more. [R36]

Contrary to common belief, numerous *beginning* female workers felt that they did not have the skills that a sex worker is expected to have. Additionally, knowledge about the availability, effectiveness and potential consequences of various forms of contraception was incomplete in the case of numerous women. Myths related to, e.g., using contraceptive pills were presented even by female workers with more experience. A frequent problem for *the beginning* female workers was to put on a condom correctly, so it does not break during the intercourse:

The first client, I was afraid because I'd never had sex with my partner wearing a condom, so the first client, putting this condom on seemed a nightmare to me that I'd never cope with [...] but I generally couldn't do anything. When I went there, I only knew my private life, sex with my partner, so I needed to learn. [R50]

3) Therefore, another element of socialization to sex work is to learn (by coaching) to perform sex activities and additional duties (e.g. pole dancing, massages) that a female worker should know. Roberts et al. (1995 after Sanders 2005b: 330) notice that the social construction of competences held by new female workers also includes the knowledge about the need to fake orgasms and sexual excitement, which are transferred through stories and observations. The female co-workers also provide each other with instructions about *professional tricks*. They are related to ways that facilitate the performing of sex activities and which allow the women to make the proper choice of sex position, so the intercourse is less tiring and dangerous for the female worker, and as short as possible (cf. Bryan 1965: 293; Heyl 1977; Prus, Irini 1988).

4) An extremely important issue in the scope of the number and intensity of sex services experienced by the female workers is that they familiarize themselves with the techniques of adjusting their body to intensive work, e.g., the need to use lubricants, or minimizing breaks at work related to menstruation. Taking the con-

traceptive pills without any breaks or *working with a sponge* in the vagina allows them to maximize their working time, but it may also trigger some discomfort, both physical and mental.

5) The interaction and communication skills related to establishing and maintaining contact with the client are just as important as particular instructions on sexual intercourse (cf. Chapter 4). A special role is played by tricks allowing the women to successfully *con* the client, so he spends as much money in the venue as possible. It is also important for *the beginning* female workers to become familiar with the manners (developed by the colleagues) of *dealing with clients* who try to dominate the interaction and abuse the female worker (cf. Chapter 6). The information related to the course of meetings with *the regulars* of a given agency is also extremely valuable. Agency gossip that is in the form of stories told between meetings with the clients provides a rich source of knowledge about this. They allow the exchange of information about particular men who visit the venue, their expectations, preferences and behaviors. *Stories about different cases* are an extremely important element of *professional socialization*. They often present untypical, surprising situations, including violent ones, which complement the catalog of potential behaviors of the clients. This is how *the novice* female workers find out what may happen to them at work and how to respond to such situations (cf. Prus, Irini 1988). Hence, they have some cognitive functions:

It's an interesting topic when every girl tells something that has happened to her. I don't have too many stories to tell, but if a girl has worked here for three years, or even for a year or two, she's got plenty of cases to talk about, so I sit there and listen with an open mouth. Yeah, they aren't ashamed of what they did at all, what situations they had, and I listen to them, surprised. There are different sexual deviancies. [R31]

Discussing and working through the most memorable or surprising meetings in groups helps *the novices* to determine the boundaries that clients cannot cross. The stories also play a destigmatizing role, making them aware that whatever happens *in the room* might be not only a source of shame but also a topic for conversations, analyses, and jokes. *Humorous stories* about the events *in the room*, about *taking the client down*, discharge the tension related to the work. They also provide some kind of entertainment that breaks the monotony of waiting for clients.

It is worth noticing the *socialization to sex work* is of a permanent and mutual character. Each new female worker, thanks to her unique experiences, can provide the others with some knowledge about dealing with clients during interactions *in the lounge* and *in the room*. These actions provide an answer to the need for information about the work, which can be fulfilled only by contact with people involved in prostitution. Hence, the stories told by the female co-workers and their observations play a role similar to informal workshops that, in the case

of other professions, prepare the workers for dealing with clients (the analogy to training sessions for salesmen was used by Hughes, 1971: 342–345, and Heyl 1977 after him).

Relations between female co-workers affect not only the sphere of work actions, but also the emotional and mental fields (Konecki 2007: 55). Identified and internalized rationalizations and explanations allow the women to deal with the unique characteristics of the work and to carry on with the process of *getting involved in the work in the agency*.

3.4. BETWEEN RIVALRY AND COOPERATION – A SUMMARY

The work at an agency should not be considered only in the context of interactions with the client *in the room*. It is of a team character, performed in social surroundings including other workers, under their influence, with their help or despite their *hostile actions*. Teamwork is also related to numerous advantages for the female workers themselves (a greater selection of women attracts clients and allows them to divide the work with a client among several female workers; it is a chance to receive some mental support and socialization to sex work; and it provides a greater feeling of security, etc.). The strength of weak ties (Granovetter 1973) between female workers allows them to exchange information about the working conditions in various agencies (in a given city or state, or even abroad), about ways of dealing with *the bosses*, co-workers, and clients, and effective work strategies. This allows them to improve the effectiveness of actions undertaken both by particular female workers and the whole team. On the other hand, the work in the agency is accompanied by jealousy, competition, and rivalry, which are a certain cost that the female workers must bear in exchange for other conveniences (venue, promotion, security). In an efficiently operating team, the relations between the female co-workers are in the form of a relatively harmonious cooperation. Its preservation depends on the effectiveness of the women suppressing their negative emotions, controlling themselves, and on relative loyalty, supported by a system of efficiently operating *alliances between workers*. Therefore, the team of female co-workers finds itself in an *unstable equilibrium between rivalry and cooperation*. If strict rivalry dominates there, the agency faces more problems related to the *hostile actions* by the female workers, fluctuation, and the hampered socialization of *the new*. In turn, if the *metanorms* block any rivalry, the agency can bear some financial losses. The female workers, while focusing on the development of a good working atmosphere, do not strive to maximize their profits. The mutual relations between the described categories are presented in Figure 1.

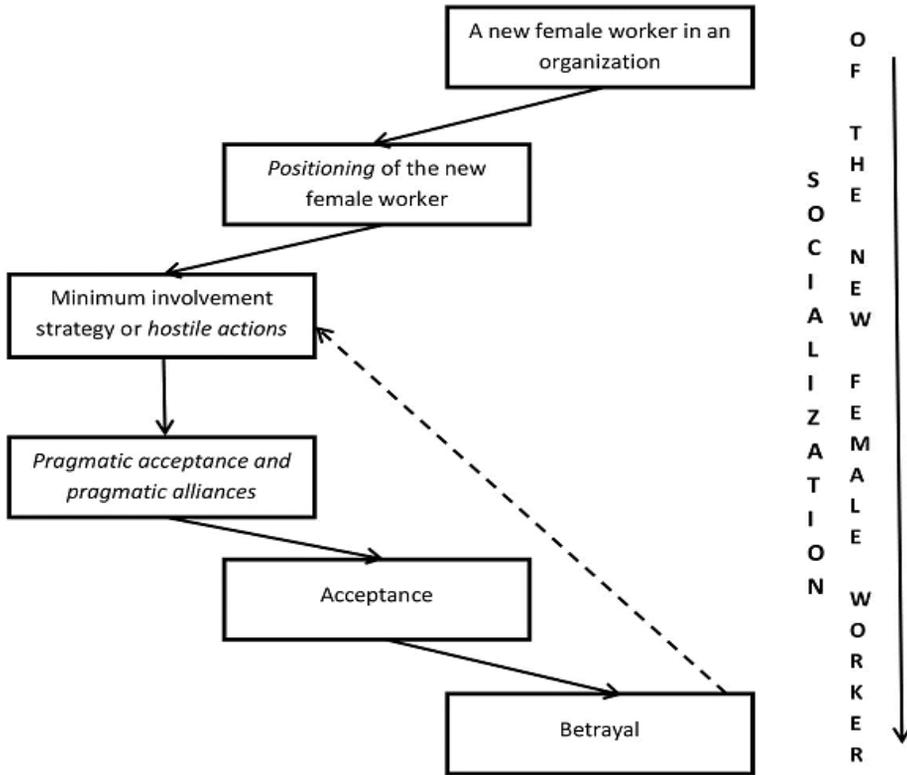


Figure 1. Development of relationships between female co-workers
Source: own works

The character of interactions between workers is reflected in how they carry out actions with the clients *in the lounge*, which I will describe in more detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

WORK WITH THE CLIENT *IN THE LOUNGE*

Female workers' interactions with co-workers and managers of the agency allow them to adjust the work conditions to an individual's needs and expectations. However, the main actions and source of income of the women is the *work with the client*.

The roles of the female worker and the client are of a complementary character (cf. Oyster 2002: 30). They are developed during interactions in two types of space in the agency: *in the lounge* and *in the room*. Although the course, purpose, and dynamics of the interactions in those various contexts differ, together they create a *performance* (Goffman 2000: 45). The regular stages of this performance are: establishing contact, selecting the sex worker, and the meeting *in the room*.¹ This ritual arrangement of a meeting, known to the *regulars* and the experienced female workers, structures and orders the interaction to a certain degree.² Both parties act within the clearly stipulated principles of the venue, which makes the course of the meeting predictable to a great extent. However, along with gaining experience, the partners learn to manipulate it in such a manner as to achieve their objectives. An important dimension of interactional work (Strauss et al. 1985) with clients is *strategy*. The female workers strive to *economize their work*, meaning to direct the meeting in such a manner as to achieve the highest advantages with the lowest effort, minimizing the risk and dangers as well as their *own losses* (disgust, unacceptable sexual behaviors). In the next two chapters, I will describe the process of working with a client *in the lounge* and *in the room*, considering those from the perspective of the actions undertaken by the female workers.

4.1. STRATEGIES FOR CHOOSING CLIENTS *IN THE LOUNGE*

The first interactions between the clients and the female workers take place when the partners meet in the space of *the lounge*. In such a situation, the client can take a closer look at the female workers and start a conversation with them.

¹ The course of such an interaction undergoes certain patterns, and it has survived from the times of ancient lupanars (Roberts 1997).

² On the other hand, lack of awareness by *novice* clients and *beginning* female workers regarding this process triggers their concern and embarrassment.

Afterward, he selects the one that he will spend time *in the room* with, for the time he paid for. However, this simple description does not reflect the complexity of subprocesses that form the interaction *in the lounge*. Although it is often assumed that it is the client who takes the active role, based on my research, I can put forward a thesis that it is the female workers who are greatly responsible for the shape of the interactions, even if the clients (as well as the female workers themselves in some situations) are not fully aware of that. Some active actions undertaken by the female workers can be observed from the first moments the client enters the venue. This is when the female worker *categorizes* the man and *estimates his value*, at the same time deciding on how involved she will be in the interaction. This is the basis for differentiating two strategies for choosing a client: selective and non-selective.

4.1.1. Selective choice of clients

The lack of possibility to choose clients and the necessity to provide sex services to all the willing ones was perceived as one of the basic features that have defined prostitution for hundreds of years (Kuryłowicz 2014). However, as observed by numerous authors, this condition has lost its significance nowadays.³ In the case of my research, the interactions *in the lounge* were not one-sided choices made by the client, with the unconditional acceptance of the female worker. This situation was of a more symmetrical nature, with the meeting *in the room* being a result of a series of actions and decision made by both partners of the interactions. This means that the female worker could also influence directly (by rejecting) or indirectly (through her discouraging behavior) which client she wants to spend time with. I called such actions the *selective choice of clients by the female workers*:⁴

³ As emphasized by Pheterson (1993), although women provide sex services to a lot of men, it does not mean that anyone can become their client. They often make a choice not only in the case of a particular client, but also the whole category (e.g. meeting only with men that come from a given social group or have particular sexual preferences). Although such a choice is hindered in the case of women employed outdoors, according to Pheterson, this results not from the essence of prostitution, but from the situation the women find themselves in (violence, poverty, lack of experience, etc.), and it is those conditions – not the prostitution – that should be tackled (Pheterson 1993: 40).

⁴ It should be stressed that this *choice* is mutual, because the clients also evaluate the female workers and select the one they will spend time *in the room* with. Based on the interviews with key clients, the criteria for making a choice seem to be: the female worker's erotic capital, her external appearance (fulfilling the erotic fantasies of a given man; thus, this is not necessarily the canon of commonly shared beauty), her demeanor and attitude towards the clients, as well as the scope of services offered. However, a more detailed analysis of the clients' perspective and their tools for categorizing affiliation (Sacks 1972) is beyond the framework of this chapter.

It's not like someone comes and you go with him right away. Me for example. I have never done it. When I see a guy and I don't like him, that he's a boor or a slob or anything, I'd never do it, definitely not. And even if he'd like to come with me, even if he'd give me 500,000 zlotys right away, I wouldn't go, never! [R40]

It's not like when someone pays, I'm anybody's because he has the money. There's no way. There's recruitment, and I can choose this one or that one. It's not like I go out for everyone, and those who DO, they do it for money. Anyway, I WON'T go out, because I feel DISGUST. Typical feelings, I think. [R37]

It is not in every escort agency that *the selective choice of clients* can be performed. Wherever the *oppressive* management style or that based on *excessive fraternization* is employed, the female workers are encouraged to accept all clients. However, in the case of agencies with the *distanced* or *kind professionalism*, *the bosses* do not force such behaviors, perceiving it as an element that increases the fluctuation of the female workers. On the other hand, not every female worker who could employ the *selective choice* does it. Applying this strategy means having a lower number of clients, and often lower earnings.

A basis for the choice made by the female workers is *the categorization of clients* (cf. Sacks 1996). This categorization takes place according to the criteria perceived as significant for the course of interactions *in the lounge* and most of all *in the room*. It may take place before the actual meeting (e.g. thanks to a monitoring system installed in the venue), but it mainly takes place during the first minutes of the interaction *in the lounge*. Of crucial significance for the course of the interactions are: the first impressions as well as the knowledge and experience the female workers have thanks to their previous interactions. The classifications not only provide a direction for the actions, but they also trigger a set of expectations towards "the object." They also confront it with memories related to interactions with similar "objects" in the past (Strauss 2013: 25). As a result of her estimates, the female worker makes a decision about whether to get involved and court the client *in the lounge* (and later *in the room*) or leave it as he is not really worth trying, otherwise, it would be better to discourage him from interacting. Later in this chapter, I will present the main criteria for categorizing clients that are the basis for estimating their *value* and making a decision on any later interaction (cf. Strauss 2013: 24–25).

The scope of the female worker's knowledge about the clients is extremely significant within the process of their categorization. Face to face interactions allow them to obtain a lot of information about an individual, his status and social affiliation (Goffman 2010: 82). In the case of a meeting *in the lounge*, the personal facade elements, which can be quickly noticed and interpreted, are of special significance (Goffman 2000: 53). It is mostly the characteristics of his appearance that allowing the women to assess his financial situation and anticipated behavior

during their face to face interactions. This is the basis on which the female workers categorize clients, allocating them to a group determined by a given category (cf. *membership categorization device*, Sacks 1972: 332; also Rancew-Sikora 2007; Silverman 2007: 164–177). This allows the women to *estimate the client's value* and is the starting point for decisions about further actions towards them. These estimates are not moral judgments, rather an attempt to predict whether a given man will fulfill the conditions of the *commercial contract* during the interaction *in the room* (Sanders 2005a), according to principles that a female worker believes are advantageous.

The process of *value estimation* is quite different in relation to the men who are *regulars* in a given venue. In such a situation, a female worker may refer to her organizational knowledge which is rooted in her own or her co-workers' experiences, but also those of the security workers or bartenders. In the case of a new client, the categorization is based only on the perceived external assets, and the employed categories are of a general character (Rancew-Sikora 2007: 75).

Regarding the fact that there are many suitable categories that describe people, the selection of a particular one is justified by what each person does in a given interaction (Rancew-Sikora 2007: 75).

A data analysis suggests the existence of several groups of criteria *estimate the client's value*. One of the most important criteria is the level of wealth. It may be reflected in the sex worker's profits, and thus the *profitability* of the interaction. From the female workers' perspective, it is most advantageous to court a client who gives the impression that he can afford to prolong the meetings, pay for additional services, purchase a drink, and leave a tip. However, an appropriate estimation of the client, based on the *wealth symbols*, is not an easy task, all the more that wealth need not go hand in hand with generosity. Based on their experiences, the interviewees divided their clients into several types:

There are those who come here on their payday, take a bit of that money, and their wives wouldn't know. There are also those who simply have their own enterprises, their own businesses, their money, and they are totally independent of their wives, they don't need to explain, and there are those who save up their money, and when they already have that hundred zlotys, they go for this hour, and they have to make the most of it. Every minute. He had been saving that hundred zlotys for God knows how long, and he thought that this hundred was like everything, that you will do EVERYTHING for this hundred! Just EVERYTHING that he has with his wife, because he's got that hundred zlotys. There are some guys like that, but not too many. Most of the guys want to get something, but it is related to additional costs. [R1]

The female workers, while developing their predictions of how financially beneficial the interaction could be, mostly evaluate the outward appearance of the client (Goffman 2000: 53). A certain indicator of wealth might be age, e.g., young men are not likely to be a good source of money:

Those youngsters usually save like 80 zlotys, 100 zlotys. It looks funny when he pulls the money out. He pulls out five zloty coins, and at the end, he says, “there you go.” So, you won’t earn anything from those guys. [R5]

Another indicator of wealth is the client’s outfit. The more expensive the brands of clothes, and the more attention he attaches to matching it with high-quality accessories, the greater the chance that, at least potentially, the man might spend a lot of money. Therefore, the female workers anticipate that client’s appearance will correspond with his behavior (Goffman 2000: 54). To make sure that their estimates are correct, they also observe how he spends the money *in the lounge*:

So, I go and ask, “Would you like a beer, maybe a drink?” “No, no, thank you.” And I already know you have no money man. When he takes a drink, he’s got something more, but if he doesn’t take it, he doesn’t have the money. [...] And he wouldn’t admit that he doesn’t have the money, he’d say that he simply doesn’t want to because he’s not interested. But when he’s only got a hundred zlotys, then what would he do with it here? And if he’s got the money, like three thousand or something, it’s different. [R34]

On the other hand, the men who are perceived as wealthy are also more demanding, according to the female workers. They often expect diversified and “fancy” sexual intercourse, and at the same time, they are not always inclined to leave tips. From this perspective, they were not the best clients for many female workers:

These average men, who get out of the house for a bit, save that hundred zlotys; they are like teddy bears, they want to hug. Sometimes they don’t even want any sex or anything, they just want to talk to another woman, look at her, give a stroke, to lie with her. Not necessarily to have sex. The guys who have more money also have bigger fantasies, the greatest needs, and as I say, they think of themselves to highly, that they can have everything. But it’s not true. [R36]

Another criterion for estimating the client’s value is *the potential problems* during an interaction. It emerges in several spheres. First of all, the female workers are especially sensitive to any signs suggesting that the client is inclined towards violent behaviors (cf. Chapter 6). While estimating the risk of violence, they refer to stereotype and prejudices related to races or social classes (cf. Cesario, Chancer 2009: 216), complementing them with observations of a given man’s behavior: how he speaks, his tone of voice, his selection of words both towards the female workers and other clients (e.g. cursing, especially using vulgar synonyms of the term “prostitute” discredits the clients, discouraging most of the female workers from having any more to do with him, cf. Sanders 2005a).

In the case of men who come to the venue under the influence of alcohol, the situation is more complicated, but *the problems* of interacting with them are clear. They may adopt the form of both aggressive behavior and the use of violence towards the female workers, as well as oppressive *drunkard grumbling*, which is not dangerous but very tiring. In contrast to appearances, such clients are not perceived in an expressly negative manner. A lot depends on:

- their level of intoxication;
- their behavior *in the lounge*;
- knowledge (based on their own or colleagues' experience) about the behavior of a given client under the influence of alcohol, and
- the previous experiences of a given female worker and her generalized belief about whether such a client can be *dealt with*, and his lack of disposition can be made use of (e.g. swindling him, a high tip), or this interaction will mean only unnecessary stress and risk, so there is no point in getting involved.

It is worth stressing that all the interviewees had already had some meetings with men under the influence of alcohol, which is understandable as the majority of clients (especially during night shifts) drinks before or during a visit to the escort agency. In this case, the *choice* means not abandoning an interaction with a client if the smell of alcohol can be detected, but to choose the man who can be *a good client* despite that.

The *problems* related to a given client are also evaluated based on his anticipated sexual preferences and expectations, identified mostly by assessing his age and the (above-mentioned) level of wealth. This is what the women base their judgments on when categorizing the clients as regards the level of involvement they will (potentially) demand during the meeting. As such, she can estimate how exhausting the meeting will be and whether it will hinder or render it impossible to work more on that day. From this perspective, the client with lower sexual possibilities is assessed the as *the better one*.

We prefer going with the older ones, because the young guys, you know, as it is with young people, they have greater predispositions, there might even be sex twice in one hour, and if they want to, we unfortunately need to do this. And they are capable. But there's no problem with the older ones, they usually do it once. And you can even cut the time, and those gentlemen have no requirements or anything. [R5]

With those youngsters I thought I'd die – with the ones who have more strength than money, because it's rare for such a guy to finish quickly [sadly]. These young men are full of energy, best to do it with force, and you know, for the whole hour, the boys leave and you've had enough. And those older men, it's obvious, it's quick, and the night is the best then [laughter]. [R33]

A client that embarrasses a female worker is also less desired, e.g., is a lot younger or very attractive physically. These features may disturb the way she plays her role, and in extreme cases, even result in her leaving that role (Goffman 2000: 195):

I prefer going to the room with an older man than with a young boy. Recently I was with a boy that was 21, and I felt like he was my child. [R10]

This older-younger dichotomy is also important from the perspective of evaluating the client's life situation. An older man who has a family and a more stabilized personal life wants to keep his visits to the venue as a secret. The case is different with young men, who for fun, out of defiance, or for other undetermined reasons, taunt the female worker when they meet her outside the venue by chance, thus threatening her division of *two lives* (Ślęzak 2010a, 2011).⁵

Indicators of *the problems* with clients were also the symbols of affiliation to certain social categories and subcultures (e.g. former inmates, football fans). They were the basis for the female workers' conclusions about the personality features of the men and how they behave in an intimate situation:

They come with tattoos, the young men, so we don't want them, actually, because they're vulgar. They want hardcore sex, very hardcore. This one guy came here, he had these dots, so you know that he's come out of prison, he hasn't had a woman for a long time, so when he jumps at you it's not very nice. [R46]

Another dimension that influences the evaluation of *the problems during interactions* is the frequency of a given client using the services offered by a given agency or similar venues. This frequency is the basis for identifying the *regulars* (of a given venue and the regular customers of a given female worker) and the *incidental clients*, which includes people of various levels of experience in the world of agencies. Becoming involved in interactions with the *regulars* of a venue poses a much safer investment. It is both because the female workers can collect information about the behavior of such a client *in the room* and the fact that thanks to a successful meeting they can get a *regular client* for the future. It is definitely riskier to court a client who does not come to the agency regularly. It may turn out that the effort invested in *getting the client* will never pay off, and the time spent with him made it impossible to get another, more promising client:

There was this seemingly nice guy, but the girls were reluctant to go with him. We know that he won't be coming here often, because he can't afford it. So, we don't really care about keeping such a client, it's obvious. But there are some regular clients who have been coming here for years, who have money, a lot of money, and these are the clients we want. [R5]

⁵ This category refers to the process of maintaining the division between the private life of female workers and their work in the agency. An inevitable element is suppressing information about the provision of sex services from acquaintances, neighbors and family members.

Meeting with a client involved in the world of agencies also provides a chance for *recommendations*– if a man is satisfied with the services provided, he might recommend this place or female worker to his friends. The advantages from such an interaction can thus go beyond a single meeting *in the room*:

Frequent visitors are all the same, most of them are regulars. They go to those all venues, so they know everything. Whether anything has changed, whether there are any new girls. [...] They know where, what, they know the prices, places with and without alcohol. They know better than us who works in this world. We don't know all the venues, but they do. And one will recommend something to the other. [R26]

On the other hand, a client who is a *regular* of an agency (one particular agency or any other) knows what to demand from a female worker and is a tougher negotiator when it comes to, e.g., determining the price for a meeting. A man without such experience often feels awkward and embarrassed in such a situation. This may hinder the interactions from the perspective of the female worker. However, such a client is often not aware of what he should get as *standard* and what he should pay for. Therefore, it is much easier to *trick*⁶ him (cf. Chapter 5).

Another dimension in which the female workers evaluate the clients was the degree to which the sexual intercourse with them caused revulsion or disgust. This usually referred to clients with low standards of personal hygiene. The female workers were reluctant to start interacting with clients strongly under the influence of alcohol or people from occupations related to physical work or small catering (especially the chefs from bars with “Chinese” food). Older men also represented this undesirable type of client for some female workers. It should be emphasized that although such adjectives as “older” and “younger” were understood by the female workers differently, the majority suggested that clients that were *too old* were classified in a separate category. These men triggered disgust in the women because of the changes in their appearance related to the aging process:

I prefer younger clients, because those older ones are sleazy, but only some of them, not everyone. Some guys really take care of themselves, they smell nice and everything. But not all of them. Not all! Some even stink, so to speak [with disgust], and it's unpleasant. And a young guy is still a young guy, it's nice to, maybe not to make love, but to do anything with him. [R47]

The female workers who took part in the research also did not accept clients with disabilities or body dysfunctions. This results from certain stereotypes or even prejudices through which they perceived those people (cf. Nelson 2003: 343) as well as from the lack of knowledge or experience in interacting with them:

⁶ An analogical mechanism is employed by *regular* clients in relation to new female workers, by encouraging them to perform actions that they could refuse, but they are not aware of this fact yet.

There was this situation that a man came. That disease is not contagious, but it's on the skin, a genetic disease, psoriasis. So, I said "no" to him. And when a guy came whose balls were the size of your head, I also said no to him. Right? And there was also a very small dwarf who came here, and one girl rejected him as well, because she said that if he got undressed, she would be laughing all the time. [R1]

There are some disabled men, but we don't serve them. I don't serve such clients. [R2]

Interactions with disabled individuals were perceived in terms of *problems*, also because of organizational reasons. In particular, when a client had any physical dysfunctions, prostheses or a wheelchair, the female workers were afraid of the *technical difficulties* during an intimate situation. Hence, the majority of them did not agree to have the meeting.

There are also other criteria worth mentioning in the context of prejudice, i.e. the race and nationality of clients that influenced the categorization process in two ways. Usually, the female workers demonstrated some prejudices towards men of other races, nationalities or ethnic origins, which were not based on any experiences of meeting such people. They were rooted in *organizational stories* but maybe also by the already shared prejudice (Nelson 2003: 154). They adopted a shape of generalized fear, hate, and reluctance (e.g. I won't go *to the room* with a Romany, I don't like Russians, Arabs, etc.). In this case, the female workers had no chance to change their beliefs as they avoided contact with those groups:

Me, for example, I wouldn't go to the room with a black guy. I had such a possibility many times here, but unfortunately no. I'm not a racist, but I simply don't know, I could not have sex with a man with black skin. It could be different if this was mixed-race or an Arab, because you go with them, but then you don't, or at least I don't offer any oral sex without a condom, definitely not. We've got some, when it comes to darker skin. [...] There was this black guy recently, but I didn't even go out to the lounge to meet him. [R5]

The prejudices towards a person of a given race, nationality, or ethnic group can be "validated" by their own experiences of interacting with such people. Reluctance to meet them was, in this case, presented as rational behavior:

These condoms may be too large or too small for guys, but it's easier to stretch them than to put them on those small ones. But it's really a problem in the case of Chinese guys, because they sometimes slip off or stay inside [laughter]. It's a farce then, which is why the girls are reluctant to go with them. [R53]

However, it should be stressed that some nationalities were perceived through the prism of a positive stereotype (Nelson 2003: 28); they were especially desired and valuable clients. This referred mostly to all men from Western Europe, who paid with foreign currency. The foreigners were also easy targets of abuse and

deceit related to overstating prices or not performing the services they paid for, under the pretext of problems with communication.

The first moments with the client are related to intense observation and categorization, thanks to which a female worker can quickly decide on which actions to undertake towards the client *in the lounge* (cf. Strauss 2013: 24). While determining the *clients' value*, the female workers divide them into unwanted, “bad” (aggressive, not taking care of his hygiene, highly demanding in sexual terms, of a non-standard body shape or the size of his genitals, cheap, bad-looking), wanted, “good” (not too demanding, generous, kind, of an average body shape and size of genitals, taking care of his hygiene, quite handsome) and those who trigger ambivalent reactions (drunk – regarding the degree of intoxication and the how they behave after they have had some alcohol, (in)experienced in the agency’s world, old/young). The formulated evaluations may differ greatly with regard to what weights the particular female worker ascribes to particular dimensions. So, for some of them, a man under the influence of alcohol will be worse, while for others he might be the ideal client (if he falls asleep quickly *in the room* and spends the hour he paid for in such a way). A young man may cause problems for one female worker regarding his expectations of sex, while for another he will be desired, as he elevates her self-esteem. The value ascribed to a given client does not exist in himself but rather within the relationship between him and the female worker who makes the categorization (cf. Strauss 2013: 26). These categorizations are like scripts that help the female worker organize her knowledge about the client and plan the course of the meeting if she decides to undertake the interaction⁷. However, attention should be paid to the fact that the clients (especially *the regulars*) work on their image and manipulate the features that are the basis for categorizations. This most often involves creating the impression that they have significant financial means that they can devote to a female worker if she meets their expectations *in the room*:

They sometimes take out a wad of bills. I don’t know where they get these wads from. And this one guy said once, “You know how much money is there?” Really, sometimes they can boast like this [...] But it doesn’t mean that they are generous. [R9]

The scope of the *manipulated presentation* may be a lot broader, and it may relate to the majority of dimensions described previously. The techniques of impression management (Goffman 2000) are especially effective towards *the beginners*. They assume that the clients present themselves in an authentic manner *in the lounge*, just like the female workers do. However, over the course of time, the female workers learn the techniques of effectively *managing the interaction with the client* (cf. Chapter 5), at the same time becoming more suspicious in relation to his self-presentation:

⁷ Therefore, the categorizations are created and employed locally, although they existed previously as cultural resources.

They are usually all left by their wives. And this is the first time they're in the agency. But it's the third time I've seen him. But he keeps saying it's the first time. Ok, let it be the first time. [...] I don't know why they say that, so we behave better towards him since he's here for the first time? [R34]

As she gains experience, the female worker also learns not to unmask the client's deconstructed self-presentation, but rather use that knowledge as a way of achieving her own interaction goals:

I don't believe the clients, because I know they lie, they're dishonest, they boast about being so rich, saying that they will cover you with flowers, [...] So I'm like, "Yeah, yeah, you're right." I just nod, but I don't believe them. And they still want a five-zloty discount. [R51]

It should be noted that adopting the *selective choice of clients strategy* was presented in the interviews within the context of a moral discourse, as an indicator of *respecting oneself* and not losing the sensitivity connected with sexual relations with men:

I've ALWAYS liked older men. But an "older" man or an "elderly" man makes a difference. It's totally impossible for me to be with a guy that is 50 or 60 years old. But it's still possible when the man is 40 or just a bit over 40, but only if he looks normal. I definitely won't go with someone if I smell alcohol or hear them swear, then I thank them for the conversation right away and that's it, we don't even go to the room. So, I try to maintain my identity, something I represent, and I try to stay true to myself. I don't want to chase the money, thinking, "If I don't go now, I'll lose that much, and there might be no one else who comes, so I'd better go." I think the other girls follow this. But not me. [R37]

According to the interviewees, the choice of client was also an expression of agency and independence in deciding about whom they will provide the sex services for. Using this strategy contributes to the female worker abolishing the stereotypical definition of the prostitute's role and replacing it with a vision of providing sex service according to her own principles.

4.1.2. *The non-selective approach*

In contrast to *the selective choice*, *the non-selective approach* consists in the female worker being willing to court any client who comes to the agency, and to *go the room* with anyone who chooses her. In this case, she suspends her evaluations and preferences, according to the principle that states "a client is a client":

Clients are different, but there's no difference for me if he's old, like 80 years old, for example. I don't care, I don't behave like if I don't like the guy then I won't go to the room with him, but other girls do do it sometimes. I go to the room with everyone. I don't care if he's good or bad-looking, young or old. There's no difference for me. [R7]

In the case of venues of the *oppressive management style*, it can be a pattern for relations with clients expected by *the boss*, as this allows him to maximize the profits of the agency. Thus, the pressure is on the female workers, so they accept all men and reduce the time of interaction as much as they can:

When I said that I wouldn't go with that one, the boss always told me, "How long does he want?" "An hour." "So, persuade him to get half an hour or a quarter." But it didn't matter because I still had to go with him. As I say, I can't say anything good about that boss. [R43]

Even if a female worker is not forced by *the boss* of the venue, she can decide to adopt a *non-selective approach to the clients*, as a dominating or situational pattern, e.g., when there is the highest financial need. The main motivator for using this strategy is money. Each client is a potential source of profit, so abandoning this source generates some *costs of lost opportunities*. To avoid them, the female workers decide to maximize the number of clients, which often means accepting almost all the willing ones:

This was most often the case in the Netherlands. I didn't have to go if I didn't want to. But you looked at everything through the prism of money there. Because the wages were totally different than in Poland. [R20]

When adopting this strategy, the female workers felt similar emotions towards the clients (e.g. anxiety or disgust), but overtime, they developed ways of dealing with their own emotions and rationalizing their actions. One of them was weighing up the *selective pattern* with a lack of profit:

Here, it's like I could be in the locker room all the time, not going out, and not serving anyone who is dirty, drunk, vulgar, or wanting some impossible things. And when a guy is sober, he doesn't require anything impossible, he's just normal, etc. I have no reason to say no to him. Because? Because what? I don't have any grounds. I don't have to have a meeting with this guy, but it should be justified, because I could actually say it to everyone who comes here: "No, no, no." But again, I don't come here to sit, I come here to earn money. So, if a guy is physically in proportion, then I go, because each guy means some money. And it's obvious, the more money, the less time I have to be here. If I chose just this guy or that guy, I could be sitting here for ten years! [R1]

A way to rationalize the *non-selective* approach was to look for advantages. As noticed by the interviewees, apart from the financial aspects, this strategy also allowed them to experience surprisingly advantageous meetings with clients who, at first glance, did not seem too encouraging:

It's sometimes like I have to go, although he's really disgusting. But then it turned out that he talked for most of the time and gave me all this money. And then I realized that you shouldn't judge a person by their appearance, because I often went with someone who looked like a beggar but gave me more money than someone who looks like a rich guy. Or a bad-looking guy comes in, but then he turns out to be such a fun boy that you can laugh your head off. You can say something to a disgusting guy to discourage him, but if a man is just bad-looking, it's harder. For sure he's not looking for a wife here, so I don't need to get into a relationship or anything [laughter]. [R33]

Another way of managing one's emotions to undertake a meeting with a client is to trigger some compassion towards him:

There are many clients that I don't like, [sadly] so I say to myself that he's so poor, that not everyone needs to be good-looking or handsome or anything. He is what he is, but he should also get something from this life. I said it to myself once when this ugly guy came in, that not everyone needs to be good-looking. But as soon as I hugged him, I felt really sorry for him. Because the girls may reject him because he's not handsome or something. [R30]

This motif is also presented by the clients themselves, who tell *sad tales* (Goffman 2011: 148) of unhappy marriages, unfulfilled sexual and emotional needs (perceived as "natural" by the men), which they are willing to find in the agency. From the perspective of the female workers, these interactions require intense emotion management. At the very minimum it requires surface acting, but it can require deep acting. This is how the workers may trigger certain feelings, allowing them to experience emotions that should be expressed in a given interaction, or to block those that hinder them doing this (Hochschild 2009: 39). Being involved in emotional labor helps the women to adjust to the *non-selective* approach situation, but also to prostitution in general.

As I have already mentioned, the female workers who presented the *selective pattern for choosing clients* often evaluated the *non-selective* approach negatively. They perceived it as an attribute of outdoor prostitution (assessed as the most mediocre type of prostitution) and a premise of *not respecting oneself*. Hence, they distanced themselves from the female workers who adopted such a strategy, and with whom they did not want to be identified during the interviews. However, it must be noted that from the functional point of view, the female workers *non-selectively* accepting the clients that their colleagues did not want to interact with allows the *selective* strategy to exist, and vice versa. The female workers *choosing*

the clients selectively, by refusing to go with some men, allows the co-workers to maximize their profits. From this perspective, both strategies are valid and necessary for the escort agency and its female workers.

Finally, I would like to mention that applying the *selective* or *non-selective* approach is not a constant feature. Despite the fact that some of my interviewees were more determined to carry out the *selective* strategy than others (e.g. regarding the way they understood their role), a series of other factors also influenced their actions:

- categorizing a particular client;
- evaluating the position of a given agency within the local market and its popularity among clients;
- the perception of their opportunities to get a client;
- the perception of their own economic situation (both generally and on a given day/shift);
- how long they have worked and their experience – along with increasing involvement in work, the boundary of behaviors that a female worker is capable of accepting shifts, which supports the use of the *non-selective strategy*. On the other hand, the awareness of possibilities to undertake *the selective* choice also grows over time;
- the culture of the group of workers.

If a female worker evaluates her chances of obtaining clients highly, and does not feel any economic pressure, she is inclined towards enhanced *selectivity*. However, if the *traffic* in the venue is not too high, the woman does not have too many clients and her financial situation is difficult, she may decide to choose the *non-selective* strategy.

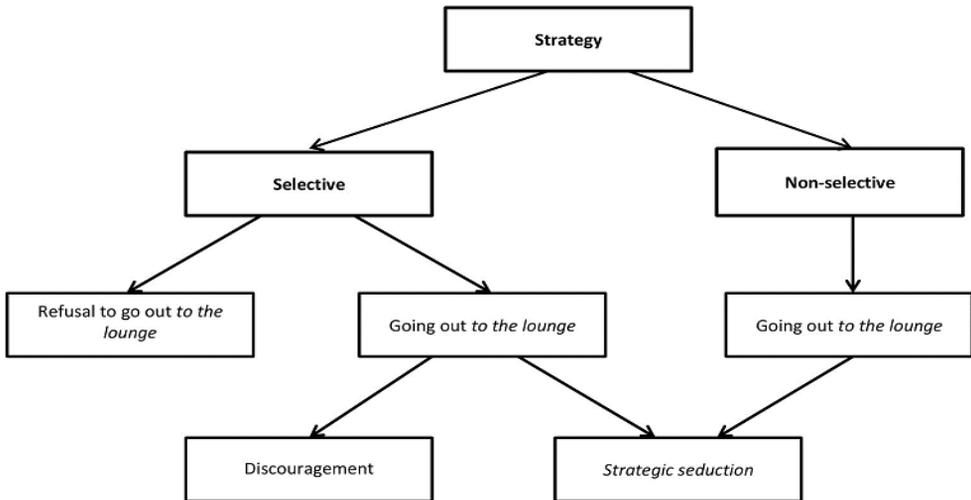


Figure 2. Work with the client *in the lounge*

Source: own works

A consequence of choosing one of the above-mentioned strategies is refusing to *go out to the lounge* or to go out to the clients with the intention of encouraging (and using *strategic seduction*) or discouraging them from undertaking any further interactions. The mutual relations between the described categories are presented in Figure 2.

4.2. TECHNIQUES FOR CHOOSING CLIENTS IN THE LOUNGE

The most expressive form of executing the *selective* strategy is *refusal to go out to the client in the lounge*. It is possible if the female workers can see who comes into the venue through a monitoring system or a one-way glass. If the categorization is negative, the female worker stays in the social room and does not go out to the client. In some extreme situations (e.g. if a man used to behave aggressively in the past, did not want to pay for the meeting or clearly violated the

norms of the escort agency in any manner), all female workers can boycott him, forcing him to leave the venue. However, this is not a frequent situation, as such behavior means a financial loss, both for the agency and for the female workers:

There are those clients who are horrible, not that they are dirty or anything, but horrible in what they do. And they come to the lounge... There is this man who comes, he sits, several minutes pass, in silence, none of us go out, the boss gets interested and comes to us, "What is it girls?" "We won't go out because he's this and that." "Ok, fine." So, he goes and says, "Please leave. The girls won't come out to you." This also happens when we know two or three girls were with him and they know what he is about. So, no one is forced to do anything. I know that it can be different in other agencies. [R1]

4.2.1. Strategic seduction

The female worker who decides to *go out to the lounge* and undertake the game of *seducing the client*, adopts tactics that can be called *strategic seduction* (cf. Deshotels, Forsyth 2006; Weizter 2009). It consists in the female worker undertaking strategic actions that are intended to imitate seduction, so to lead to a commercial sexual interaction with a client. Therefore, the basis of *strategic seduction* is not an authentic erotic fascination with a client. All partners in the interaction (the experienced female worker and the *regular* client), only the ex-

perienced female worker (*versus* an inexperienced client), only the client (a *regular* vs. an inexperienced female worker) or no partners (*beginners* in the agency world) can be aware of the fact that the interaction *in the lounge* is of a strategic nature and there are certain rules involved. Therefore, experience in such interactions is of crucial significance for the course of the *strategic seduction*. Although using these tactics depends on all partners in the interaction, I mainly focus here on the actions undertaken by the female workers towards the clients.

It is usually the case that the men who come to the venue have already decided to purchase sexual services. However, if they are not the *regular clients* of a particular female worker, it remains open which woman they will spend time with. The purpose of *strategic seduction* is to *get a client* by *stimulating his interest* in a given female worker. This takes place through impression management (Goffman 2000) and negotiating the definition of the situations, roles and identities of both partners in the interaction (Strauss 1993).

Strategic seduction starts by *attracting the client's attention*, which is more difficult the more women that work in a given venue. A key action is to take the best place *in the lounge*. If a woman finds herself as close to one of the clients as possible, it allows her not only to establish eye contact but also to make other gestures (e.g. bend towards him, touch him) and initiate a conversation, which is perceived as an expression of interest and affection (Adams, Glanes 2008: 105). If the physical distance between a female worker and the client is too large, the chances of being chosen decrease. Therefore, the women compete for the best place in the venue's space:

A client comes in and the girls JUMP on him, they sit with him. The one that was the closest was most successful because she could talk to him, stay closer to that man. [R53]

If a venue is popular and there are lots of clients during a shift, taking a worse position towards one of them can mean a more advantageous starting position for interactions with another man who will come a little later:

When the guys are choosing a girl, for example, they were sitting at the bar and then you stood next to them, or they were sitting on those couches [...], then if another guy came in the meantime, the girls who were sitting further away from the first one would move closer to the next one. And it would start again. [R23]

Another way to *attract the client's attention* is a pole dance. In some venues, it was an obligatory element of presenting the female workers that had to be performed for free, while it was an extra, charged service in other venues. Female workers who can dance skillfully can also count on greater interest from the clients and, as a consequence, on getting tips and higher earnings.

It is also extremely important for a female worker to be properly prepared and present her body appropriately, i.e., to take care of her bodily capital, which plays a key role in her interactions with clients (Sanders 2005b: 330). The individual appearance (Goffman 2000: 53), outfit, accessories, hairstyles made from long hair (including hair extensions or wigs), heavy make-up, and a tan, are intended to help in creating an image of an *agency woman*, corresponding to the fantasies of the clients (Sanders 2005b: 331). At the same time, the developed image makes it easier for the female worker to take on the role and perform it in front of a client (Goffman 2000, 2005), but also to trigger the emotions that are desirable in this interaction (Hochschild 2009: 42, note 2):

It's obvious you need to LOOK good, right? Sexy! Why do I wear thigh-length boots in summer? Because I like thigh-length boots, because I don't like going around here in high-heels at all. I feel better in thigh-length boots, because it gives me an image, I don't know, of an agency girl, let me put it this way. And, of course, such outfits are obligatory. I just need to... I need to show what I have to show! [R3]

The girls don't wear stockings because they say they don't like them. It's true that they often get damaged and you need to buy new ones. But I like them, I feel different. [R9]

An outfit that is appropriate for work must meet several conditions. Most of all, it should highlight those aspects of a female worker's figure that she especially wants the client to see (usually breasts, legs, buttocks), and at the same time hide any deficiencies. However, while selecting the different elements of an outfit, its *visibility in the lounge* must be kept in mind, both in the context of distinguishing herself from her colleagues and adjusting to the conditions of a given shift (I observed much bolder styles during the night shift). In particular, where the agency is filled with muted light or ultraviolet lamps, particular elements of the outfit (but also the make-up and haircut) should attract the eye and stand out from the background:

Generally, you need to be attractive in this kind of a job, you need to, let's say, catch the eye, you know how it is. When we go out in this light, and I have a bright wig, this length, light blond, I can be seen clearly in that wig. And I also have this slip [shows it], so you can also see it well, so I show myself off, somehow, and he can see me even though it's dark. Everything depends on how you can sell yourself. This is how you should approach it. [R29]

While putting together their outfits, the female workers also followed the results of observing how the styling (both their own and their colleagues') was reflected in the clients' interest. It was not always the case that the most visible outfit meant the highest earnings. While some clients prefer the style of a *girl from Playboy*, others prefer the *girl next door*:

When I dressed up once, I have these thigh-length boots, made from pink leather, I had this bright scarf on my hips and I have this bodice. Then I looked like, I don't know, a PLAYBOY GIRL or something, and I had my hair teased, but no one wanted me. And when, I don't know, three clients took me, they were just SHAKING! Seriously! You know, you can't be dressed too well, because they get nervous and they can't do it at all. [R2]

Therefore, the client's needs are differentiated. While for some of them the *Playboy girl* is the fulfillment of their sexual fantasies, others find this commercial aspect of the relationship to be too obvious. In such a situation they prefer female workers who offer experiences that are more similar to non-commercial interactions (cf. Chapter 5). Identifying this regularity may lead to a revision of the assumptions related to appearance that the female worker made at the beginning:

I tried harder at the beginning than I do now. I went around in stockings, but I don't feel like it anymore. I thought that I don't have to give so much of myself, it's pointless. If they want to, they'll come with me anyway. [...] We even say that guys choose the calmest ones, i.e., those who look as normal as possible. Some of them look only at the smile! He likes those natural ones, so a girl only has to look natural. [R36]

Apart from the visual aspect, *the utility aspect of the outfit* is also important, meaning how easy it is to take off particular elements. It is also important not to have any accessories that a client could use for a violent act (e.g. to choke or bind).

If a female worker *attracts the client's attention*, the next step is to *establish contact* with that client. A man should feel that a woman is interested in him and that he is sexually attractive for her⁸. It is not about her really feeling those emotions (although it is not impossible), but rather she should be capable of making an appropriate impression on the client (cf. surface acting; Hochschild 2009). Eye contact is of key importance, opening the communication channel (Adams, Glanes 2008: 104) and allowing her to show non-verbal signs of interest and affection. During the interviews, it was often the case that both the female workers and clients stressed the significance of the smile that a woman gives to a client. This is how she shows her interest in him. In this way, she breaks any embarrassment that may appear during the initial stages of the interaction:

When I go in, and I smile so sincerely, the client takes me. And he says later, "You gave me this nice look, this smile," so I know that it also gives a lot. [...] A lot of men say that when I SMILE at them, warmly, I ATTRACT them. That this smile, these happy eyes, I look so nice, and some girls make these different faces, some of them say something unkind, and this is how they repel those clients, they simply deter

⁸ A similar situation takes place in other sex work, e.g., exotic dancing (Frank 2002: 119).

them. They do it through their behavior. I often get the hours because I'm so warm, calm, and patient. And the girls often are not. [R9]

An open attitude from a female worker allows her to break the ice and start up a *relaxed conversation* with a client. According to the interviewees, the men usually choose women who are proactive, who start the conversation and *chat them up*. This allows them to break the silence that may emerge during the first moments of interaction *in the lounge*. The silence can be both an indicator of but also a reason for embarrassment (this refers especially to clients with relatively little experience of the agency's services). Establishing the first contact is often related to the use of *interaction catalysts*, which, for instance, may be a proposal to buy a drink, a request for a cigarette, or another excuse that makes it easier to start the conversation. The female workers who get commission for selling alcohol prefer this way of starting an interaction:

A client comes in, we look at him and check if we know him. If not, we go out, they sit here, and we sit there. "Would you maybe like something to drink guys?" We try to make contact, or one of the first girls says it, it DEPENDS on the client, what he does, and every girl says something. And it somehow goes slowly. [R51]

Also, the manner of carrying out the conversation is important. Regarding the fact that making the choice *in the lounge* can be quite tense for both parties, it is important that the female worker helps the client to discharge those emotions and relax:

Let's say there are two girls. The first is a little nicer looking than the second, but the second one is cheerful, talkative, and smiling, so they usually choose her. There was this ugly girl at our place, but she couldn't stop talking, rabbiting on. She was cheerful, nice, and they took her, despite the fact that there was a nice girl sitting next to her, but she didn't say anything. [...] They also like the cheerful girls, not the gloomy ones. I was shy at the beginning, I just sat, said nothing, but they sometimes chose me, because I was young. But the clients usually prefer the cheerful ones, the talkative ones, so they say anything all the time. [R33]

You sit down in the lounge, you talk about prices, smile at him. So, he sees you. And when you sit in the corner [curls up, pretends to be sad], you don't give a shit about him. And when you sit and try to like, chat, it's obvious, he sees you're interested in him, so it's normal that you would like him to choose you. Of course, a lot depends on us, on our approach! You need to have an approach! If you sit in the corner – you won't get paid. [R3]

It is helpful to use different forms of address to develop a desired atmosphere and to negotiate the relationship between the interaction participants (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2005: 156–186 after Kostro, Wróblewska-Pawlak 2011: 37).

A standard adopted in the agencies is to call each other by their first name or directly by using “you” (along with diminutive forms and nicknames) and avoiding such pronouns as “mister” or professional titles. These actions allow the women to shorten the distance and improve the symmetry of relations between the partners in the interaction, thanks to leaving the social statuses outside the agency, and perceiving each other only through the prism of sex roles. Therefore, the meeting becomes an individual whole surrounded by a “membrane” that separates it from the external world (Goffman 2010: 53).

The described actions undertaken by the female workers intended to *get a client* can differ significantly in terms of their intensity, creating a continuum from passive to active schemes of *strategic seduction*. When a *passive scheme is chosen*, the women undertook only the minimum actions intended to *provoke the interest* and encourage a man to pay for an hour. Therefore, they rather “allowed themselves to be chosen” than “seduced the client”:

The clients think in the lounge. When the girls come, the clients observe what they look like. It’s nothing like it reportedly is in other agencies, that the girls approach a client, entertain him, chat him up, force themselves upon them. Not here, it is the clients who choose [...], they come and say, “Can I have the lady who is on the right?” Then she comes and goes to the room, unless he really wants a drink, so you can give him one, but the boss doesn’t want that, because he prefers when the girls are chosen very quickly. Alternatively, you can go to the room and have a drink there, so they don’t sit here too long, and everything goes smoothly. The clients are sometimes surprised. [R28]

This pattern was typical for smaller venues that employed several female workers, without very much space or the proper infrastructure (e.g. an appropriately sizable *lounge* equipped with couches, poles, a platform, a bar, etc.) that would allow them to effectively use *strategic seduction*. It could be also seen in the venues where, despite the appropriate conditions, they did not make use of the potential. This resulted from a vision of an agency, shared by *the boss*, that it is an organization that just offers sex services, with no extra entertainment. The corresponding vision of the client is a non-affluent person, not inclined towards spending money – on the contrary, he tries to get as much as possible for free. Thus, they strive to minimize the time that the clients spend *in the lounge* and they prefer a situation when the interactions end with the quickest choice possible of female worker and then they go to the room. Hence, the venues’ managers cared more about the quick interactions of female workers with numerous clients than extended meetings with a smaller group of clients:

There is a pole, but no girl dances on it, but if it was forced then the girls would dance, a little at least, there could be some kind of presentation, because I know that each girl can dance in her own way. It’s enough to encourage them. But on the other hand, it’s like the boss says, what if the client only watched them dancing, then left,

not interested in anything more? And this is why it stayed that way. The boss prefers when everything happens in the room, you can take the alcohol or anything. [R53]

This scheme is also typical for venues that obtain clients through Internet ads. In such cases, the female worker is selected *online*, by evaluating published images, avoiding the interaction games *in the lounge*. A man comes to a venue to an already chosen female worker, often not even meeting other women, minimizing any direct rivalry among the women. As it was related to lower emotional costs, it was a very convenient mode of work for numerous interviewees. This belief is also shared by many clients:

There are a lot of calls from guys asking if I AM ALONE. I usually say that I'm with a friend, for safety reasons, so they know that no one is alone in the apartment, but also, they don't want ten girls to be there, they want some privacy. I had this client, back in the apartment, who said that when six girls come out, he immediately leaves because he feels OVERWHELMED by the fact that he NEEDS TO CHOOSE a girl, and it's not for him. And this is why a lot of girls publish ads on the Internet. Because then he calls a particular girl. He's got a smaller choice, he doesn't need to stress that he has to choose this girl, because not everyone CAN choose. [...] But some of them want it to be quiet, calm and discrete. They don't want to be seen by ten girls, but only by this one girl. [R36]

The interactions adopt a completely different form in the *active scheme of seducing a client*, where the female worker's success depends on whether she can present herself in a way suggesting she embraces the role (Goffman 2010: 86), i.e., as a person desiring sex and adventure, and that she is fascinated with the client. This requires directing the interaction in such a way that the client gets involved in the game, embraces its strategic character and derives pleasure from the female worker's actions, which he interprets as *authentic* (cf. Chapter 5). Thanks to the appropriate topics of conversation, the exposure of corporeality, touching the clients and allowing herself to be touched, there is a *fun atmosphere* generated *in the lounge*, of an *erotic character*. The interpersonal skills of the female workers are of crucial importance, such as their sense of humor, or ease in establishing and maintaining a conversation. Therefore, even those women who are not very popular among clients due to their age or appearance, can *get* them, winning them round during a funny conversation, keeping them company while they have a drink or listening to their stories, etc. The interviewees determined such an action as *winning over the client*:

Sometimes, you know, if you don't drink with a client, you won't earn. Because he only wants to drink with you. And sometimes I simply win over a client in the lounge. He doesn't like me at first glance, but after he talks to me, he says, "Shit, you're a nice chick." [R20]

However, it should be noted that the *active scheme of seducing a client* is usually related to the intense rivalry between the female workers, who make use of all available means of attracting attention to themselves:

So, a client comes in, all the girls pounce, kiss him, do everything, they sit on his lap, hug him, they get undressed, dance on those poles, it's a real fight for the client. [R1]

This has a negative influence on the relations between the workers and may provoke *hostile actions* (cf. Chapter 3).

The *active scheme of seducing a client* was followed in agencies and night-clubs where *the lounge* was the main space for interactions between the clients and the female workers. It was adapted using appropriate furniture (couches, tables, a platform and poles for dancing, lights, the sound system, music, a bar with alcohol, etc.), and design of the space that would encourage the clients to stay there for longer. *The bosses* got the women sufficiently involved thanks to a system of remuneration, not only for sexual encounters but also for the time spent *in the lounge*. Therefore, the female workers did not care about quickly moving to the sexual intercourse. On the contrary, if they were capable of encouraging the clients to buy drinks, the time spent *in the lounge* could be as profitable as that spent *in the room*, but much less tiring.

Finally, it should be stressed that skillfully carrying out *strategic seduction* depends, to a great extent, on seniority and experience in sex work. The ways of dealing with clients and using spontaneous behaviors *in the lounge* result from socialization in the environment of the agency⁹. The interviewees, recalling their first times of going out *to the lounge*, described strong emotions of shame, anxiety, embarrassment, intimidation, and how they found it impossible to speak up or even make eye contact with a client, which virtually made it impossible to *get a client*:

I was scared, really scared, when I went out for the first time. How would this guy LOOK at me, how would I SIT there? How on Earth would I SIT there?? [R2]

I shouldn't have been so afraid. I lost, for sure, like, five clients because I was shy. Because I was, like, scared, and I didn't know if I should look at him or not. And then there's another girl who chats him up. [R31]

For *beginning* female workers encountering this specific form of interaction, the clients choosing the women was often a painful experience, perceived as degrading, objectifying and humiliating:

⁹ The client also must learn some patterns of action in this context.

There were a lot of girls. And then when we went out, we were paraded, like horses before a race or something. That's how I compared this to myself, there were eight or nine girls. And there were three clients per day, let's say [...] we went out when the bell rang, one opened the door and we all stood by the wall, as if we were about to be executed or something, and the guy would choose, pointing with his finger, "Ok, you can go to the room with me." [R46]

Such a perspective did not emerge in conversations with women of longer tenure in the agency. This may result from their adjustment, in the process of anticipatory socialization, to how interactions are organized *in the lounge*, and the development of mechanisms to cope with such a situation. It was helpful for numerous women to see their actions as a performance in a specific role. Paradoxically, treating the interactions *in the lounge* as a strategic game allowed some female workers to regain their feeling of subjectivity. Therefore, they were able to establish interactions with a client at a level of involvement that he expected.

4.2.2. Working to discourage the client

Female workers who prefer the *selective choice* of clients but cannot refuse to go out *to the lounge* (e.g. regarding pressure from *the boss*), and who evaluate the potential interaction as not very advantageous, do not undertake *strategic seduction*. They engage in actions intended to *discourage the client or dampen him down*, trying to discourage him from closer involvement in a more or less direct manner. The women's actions are a mirror image of those performed by the female workers who *seduce* the clients. They mostly involve: increasing the physical distance from the client, occupying a place away from him, non-verbally signaling their lack of interest in a meeting *in the room* (looking away, a bored look, reluctant facial expression, making faces), even using some discouraging verbal communication. It obviously requires a certain level of delicacy so that the client does not feel offended. He might still re-evaluate his choice and *go to the room* with another female worker, providing the agency with profits. Therefore, the female workers who *discouraged the client* referred to external and objective reasons (another job, bad mood, the limited range of services provided) which suggested that the client should choose another person:

When you don't want to go to the room, you just sit, look at the ceiling or anything, you can pick your nose [laughter] or for example, when he comes to sit with you, [...] for example, I don't know, I sit next to him, and if there's nobody around and no one hears it, you say that you have your period and you can't work, that you're sore. The period is the best solution, or that I'll do nothing in the room if he wants any extras. I say all of this to discourage him, but not in anybody's presence, but when he chooses me, we go to the bar to pay and then I'm like, "No, come, let's sit and talk," and then I tell him all this stuff so he doesn't choose me. [R33]

The female workers acted similarly when they wanted to *discourage* a client from extending the meeting:

When a guy was really annoying, oh my God, another hour with that man! How would I bear it? A nightmare. Most often I just said that I had run out of condoms. “I’m out of condoms, take another girl, will you?” [fakes a nice tone of voice]. “Can’t you borrow one?” “I can’t because we don’t do that here. I need to go buy some, and you can take another girl.” [R43]

Hence, through *the discouraging actions*, a female worker can perform *the selective strategy* in a manner that is unnoticed by her co-workers and *the boss*.

4.2.3. Strategic seduction as a group action

I presented *the strategic seduction* above as an action undertaken towards the clients by individual female workers. However, very seldom is it performed in private. The individual actions of the women are carried out in the context of their female co-workers’ actions, and together they form a performance addressed to the clients. Thus, to understand the essence of *strategic seduction*, its collective dimension should also be considered.

The female workers form a team *in the lounge* that works together on creating the performance (Goffman 2000: 109) and developing an appropriate *atmosphere*. To preserve that atmosphere, it cannot be *boring* in the agency; the female workers cannot look like they are in conflict or they are reluctant towards the clients, they should always seem talkative, cheerful, and ready for fun (cf. Sanders 2005b: 329):

You need to talk to them, to carry on a conversation: “Where are you from?”; “Have you been in another club today?” ANYTHING, anything. And the bartender also says to us, “Girls, talk about ANYTHING, about eye color, how much snow there is, it doesn’t matter. Just say something, in general, any stuff.” If the girls sit down and sit like asses, the clients want to leave, because even if one of them is nice, it’s boring. I mean, if she was very beautiful, they wouldn’t go, I think, but if there are only average girls, sitting silently, they just go. [R33]

I witnessed it numerous times during my observations on a night shift that the interactions *in the lounge*, thanks to the actions undertaken by the female workers, turned into something *fun*. The clients and female workers danced, joked, switched roles (e.g. a client tried a pole dance), and drank alcohol, which facilitated more casual behaviors. Observing the venues while they were being prepared for the night shifts resemble a theater before an evening performance. The regular lights were turned off, and some lamps dotted here and there with subdued light-

ing (including ultraviolet bulbs) were turned on, as was some music. The lights were utilized to expose only selected places (the bar, the platform with poles for dancing), while others remained in the shadow or were just barely illuminated. As a consequence, there was half-light *in the lounge*, which influenced the dynamics of the interactions, making it easier to undertake actions related to reducing the physical distance (Hall 2009) and establishing bodily contact. Also, the interactions partners, not able to see too clearly, could not observe the other clients, which encouraged courageous behaviors. At the same time, such a manner of organizing the interaction leveled the chances of those female workers who did not stand out with their bodily capital. In this agency's half-light, a client was often not able to see what the female worker with whom he had decided to spend time *in the room* actually looked like:

My favorite time is between eight in the evening to one in the morning. It's when I still feel good physically, there aren't any too-drunk clients, and there's no light in the lounge, just the ultraviolet, so you can hide all of your deficiencies [laughter]. [...] And you turn off the lights in the room, leaving just those in the bathroom, so there's this half-light, and here, when I come for a day shift [...] then you don't have any chance to make it, because the girls are young and slim. [R10]

During the performance, the team members are dependent on one another. Each of them is forced to rely on the remaining ones to maintain a specified definition of the situation in front of their audience (Goffman 2000: 112). Any member may also spoil or cease the interaction because of their behavior. Therefore, to render the performance sincere, it is necessary to hide any damaging information from the audience which is not compliant with the impression that the team wants to make (Goffman 2000: 169). This usually refers to controlling mutual negative emotions related to jealousy and envy among female workers:

I think that we all come here to earn some money, and we should stick together, cooperate, to shake some money out of this guy, and not to sit sullenly in the lounge. Because when the guys come with a group, they also feel it, and this one guy once said to us, "There's this unhealthy atmosphere here, these girls sit, one in this corner, the other in over there." Because when the girls like each other, they are cheerful, they sit together and have fun, they give the impression of a nice atmosphere, so the guy gets involved, he also has fun and is more willing to spend his money. But when one girl sits in one corner and the other girls in another corner, and they say nothing to him, he feels the atmosphere is not like he would want it to be. It must be fun, he must have a lot of fun to leave his money here. [R32]

Women with certain experience of working in the agency feel it intuitively that their individual actions are part of a collective performance. The better cooperation among them, the more effective they are in complementing their offer,

and the greater the venue's popularity among the clients, which is beneficial for all its workers. Therefore, apart from this rivalry and negative emotions that can emerge among the female workers, they need to take care of the course of the performance. Thus, they restrain themselves from mutual attacks while they are *in the lounge*, and they limit them to interactions "backstage":

It tends to be different among the girls, but they need to stay together in front of a client. [R17]

It is also significant for the course of *strategic seduction* how the actions of female workers are perceived by the groups of clients, which will be discussed in the next subchapter.

4.2.4. Strategic seduction and groups of clients

Based on my observations and interviews, it can be argued that clients visit the agencies individually or in a group of friends. The first situation takes place mostly during the day and on weekday evenings, while during night hours and weekends, the clients usually come in groups:

Here, they usually come alone, as you noticed. But at night, there might be a group of guys in a club or something, usually three or four of them, and one of them will say something to the others, usually when they're on their way home from a party or a match or something, and then they come in groups, of like four people. Or sometimes four will come, one will choose a girl and the rest of them just sit there. Or three of them choose their girls and one stays and sits. Or goes home. It depends on how much they like the girls. [R33]

Because it's like, "Oh, we had a beer, so now we're going [smiles] to this place." So, they come in groups, because they work together, they're close, and they go out together. [R45]

The course of *strategic seduction* changes depending on how many clients there are *in the lounge*. A client that is alone usually chooses a female worker more quickly and goes *to the room*, carrying on with the interaction in private. If there are several clients in the venue at the same time, who do not know each other, they usually do not establish any interactions. Each of them focuses on their individual relations with the female workers. It is completely different when the clients come to the agency in groups. Generally, it is advantageous for the female workers as a greater number of women have a chance to get a client. This reduces the tension related to rivalry, which is experienced more intensively if there is only one client:

I personally prefer when there are more of them, because several girls can come to the room then. And each one will earn some money. Otherwise, it's weird, there's one client, so many girls go out, so it's not too good. I always preferred when there were several clients, they all chose one, so each girl could earn, and every girl was happy. [R28]

Each client group is characterized by a variety of roles and positions which are played both in the interactions among the men, but also towards the women. It is usually composed of people with different experiences in visiting escort agencies, varied financial possibilities, and the level of motivation for purchasing sexual services. The smaller the difference between the group members in the above-mentioned terms, the less troublesome the interaction from the perspective of the female workers. They can employ the same scripts and create a single cohesive performance towards all of the clients.

To carry out this *strategic seduction* towards the group of clients in an appropriate manner, the female workers try to reconstruct the structure of positions within the group. First of all, they try to find out who plays the role of the informal leader, as he sets the tone for the group's performance. The female workers make more of an effort when interacting with that man, as it is most often the case that he initiated the choice of a particular venue, so he can also cause a change of the venue:

It's always like when there are four or five of them. There's always one who has more money and rules the other ones. It's the same with the youngsters. There is one who drags the whole group, he's got most money and gives it away so his friends can go to the rooms. There's always this one guy who drags the rest, and he's the boldest. You always need to, like, you know, do more with this one guy. Because he might have been to the agencies several times, he feels less insecure, and when he's in their company, he feels even bolder when there are several of them. [R53]

Each female worker strives to get a client as quickly as possible; thus, at the beginning, the interactions are focused mostly on those group members who seem more interested in paying for an individual meeting. The other men, those less involved, remain on the periphery of the interaction, more as observers. If they do not join the interaction actively, the female workers will focus their efforts on those men only when their more motivated friends are already in the rooms with their chosen women. This is when the second phase of the interaction begins, between the less decided men and the remaining ladies.

From the perspective of *strategic seduction*, especially troublesome are those interactions where not all the members of a group decide to pay for a meeting *in the room*. It can be frustrating when the clients are already *in the lounge*, so they potentially planned to purchase a sexual service, but then they do not decide to choose any of the female workers. The women usually employ intensive persuasion then, to try to encourage the men to change their mind or at least to identify

the reasons for their behavior. Explanations made by the would-be clients can be divided into two kinds: those related to some objective reasons, external to the female workers (“I’m just here for company”; “I never do this”) or those related directly with them (“I don’t like you”; “you’re ugly”). If a client doesn’t want to buy any sex services, the female workers, after some attempts to encourage him, cease the interaction. However, it usually triggers negative emotions:

I don’t get it. He’s with his friends, presumably, but it’s not enough that he doesn’t take part, he then has to say all this weird stuff. He could have just kept it to himself. It would be better if he had said, “I just brought my friends, I don’t do it, and that’s it.” I don’t know. Did he come here out of curiosity or what? [R23]

The groups of clients, especially if their members are under influence of alcohol or drugs, can also be a source of trouble for the female workers. This happens when, e.g., the clients use the visit to the agency to confirm their macho image within their own group (cf. Sanders 2005a) or to develop some form of cohesion by creating an atmosphere of a brotherhood (Oyster 2002: 46). Emotional contagion is frequent in such cases, and they present some degrading or even aggressive behaviors towards the female workers:

It is most often the case that when there are four or five of them, you already know that they went clubbing. “Let’s go to this agency, we’ll have a laugh, we’ll see what they have, what it looks like” [...] They are aged from 19 to 26. They know it all, they have so much money, but they probably came in his daddy’s car, and they have fun, millionaires for the night. [R20]

When there’s a group, everyone shows off in front of their friends. And it’s most intensive in the lounge. [R23]

For group members, a visit to the agency is a way to get away from their surroundings, and somehow break free from their everyday life with the support of their “team” (cf. Gorzko 2005: 8). This is especially true since an escort agency can be interpreted as a sort of “backstage life”, where the men realize their erotic fantasies and everything they do not do when they feel they are “on stage” (cf. Goffman 2000: 160). Therefore, the female workers are often afraid of interactions with men who create troublesome groups, and before they make the final decision on whether to go with them *to the room*, they carefully observe their behavior *in the lounge*:

These young guys, there are four or five of them, and they think... they call us SLUTS [with sadness], but then there are not a lot of us who will decide to go with them to the room, because if he behaves like this in the lounge, then later [...] we are afraid, you don’t know how he’ll behave later. [R53]

On the other hand, a lot of female workers realized that the unpleasant behavior of a group of clients *in the lounge* is just an act, it is not reflected in how those particular men behave *in the room*:

It's worse when three or four of them come, and one pretends to be such a hero in front of the others. But when you take them to the room, they're so quiet and nice. He's so macho, but only in front of his friends. And he's so timid in the room, as if he wasn't there at all. They're like children! Like children! [R34]

It's worth stressing that if the groups of female workers and clients have an opportunity to interact regularly and get to know each other, they can predict their performances better. This is when an interaction is more effect, each group is ready to help out the other to a greater degree to maintain the impression that they are trying to give (Goffman 2000: 195).

4.2.5. Incidents in the lounge – the breakdown of the strategic seduction

The above-mentioned problem when interacting with clients can be interpreted in categories of incidents that increase the level of tension in the interaction (Goffman 2010: 36). In the context of interacting *in the lounge*, I understand *the incidents* as a certain actor violating the standards that determine the course of *the strategic seduction* in a given venue. I would like to start by presenting the *incidents* provoked by clients.

When visiting the venue, the clients should follow some unwritten rules of *strategic seduction* or (if they do not know them) allow the agency's workers (more or less subtly) to direct their actions. If, because of embarrassment at the lack of experience, they adopt interaction principles borrowed from everyday life (which do not suit this specific context), they cause *incidents*. Failing to see the strategic character of the actions undertaken by the female workers *in the lounge* can be a source of such incidents. This results in it being impossible to make and communicate a decision regarding the choice of a particular female worker:

If a client just sits there and doesn't choose anyone, and thinks, and thinks, we all get annoyed. We don't know if we will go or not. "Come on gents, are you deciding or not"? Because he'd prefer to choose all of us, but it can't happen, something like that. "So, which one do you like the most." But there are some clients who are embarrassed. They are embarrassed to make a choice. [R51]

In contrast to the intentions of the hesitant clients, such behavior is not perceived by the female workers as a compliment (according to the principle "we are

all so attractive that the client cannot choose”). From their perspective, it is an unnecessary prolonging of the selection process, and simply a waste of time. The faster the client decides to choose a particular female worker, the better it is for the other ones, as they do not invest their resources in an interaction that will not bring them any benefits.

On the other hand, a client who chooses too quickly, *just to choose*, is also perceived negatively:

I don't know, they may be embarrassed by the fact that there are so many girls and they need to choose which one they like, and they don't know. They sometimes take the first one because they are afraid, and if this guy who is embarrassed comes to the venue, he may take the one who talks first or the one who sits first. Because he goes a bit crazy, you know? He thinks that if he chooses one, the rest will be offended. Or he gets scared and leaves the agency. [R23]

In the quote below, the interviewee compares the desires and inappropriate attitude of clients:

So, there's this guy, T., who comes. He can afford it. He invites all girls to the table, he talks with them all, he buys every willing girl a Red Bull, anything that they want. He talks and talks, and he chooses one and says, "So, I'll spend two hours with you today." And he takes her hand and they go to the room. But it depends on the man's intellect, and how he feels in the situation. Sometimes a guy comes and he's so uneasy, "Jeez, there are so many of you and there's only one of me." So, he takes one girl quickly and off they go, so he doesn't have to look at the rest of the girls because he feels ashamed. Embarrassed. He can't behave. But you know, this results from economics, because this guy, T., is a man who can afford it. He can afford to invite all the girls to the table, and the other can't, because he needed to save up his money. So, what do you do? You choose quickly and get out of there, because you feel stupid. [R32]

Whenever a client, despite seeing all the women, does not choose any of them, is also perceived negatively. Furthermore, any ways of trying to deceive the female workers are seen as a violation of the unwritten rules of behavior in the agency:

A client says that he'll go to take the money, and he doesn't comeback. They always say that they'll come back, they just need to arrange something and they'll be back. But they usually don't. All guys are different. There are those who, you know, REALLY don't take enough money. Let's say they take the hundred zlotys, but they still want some extras, so they're back in five or ten minutes. There are such guys. But I always tell them to give me some advance payment, so I'll be waiting for him for sure. So, he leaves me fifty zlotys in advance, and if he comes back it's good, but if he doesn't, I still have that fifty zlotys from him, right? [R2]

The *incidents in the lounge* were also provoked by *fraudulent clients*. They have no intention of choosing any sex worker and going *to the room*, but they want to spend a pleasant time *in the lounge*. So they buy, for example, one beer, and for this price they expect the sex workers to play *strategic seduction*. In such situations, the female workers with longer experience do not hesitate to call a halt to the interaction:

These guys came just to have a beer; they chose no one. They thought they could sit here and the girls would be with them. But the girls saw them and said that they could drink their beers in the rooms. So, they left right away. [R30]

If a guy is certain and knows what he wants, it takes like five minutes. Meanwhile, others would like to sit and drink, and not even buy anything. For them it would be best if we all just sat there. No, we sit with them 20 minutes at most, and they either buy something or not, and then we're gone because we can tell nothing will happen, so why would I sit even for those 10 or 15 minutes. [R51]

Another problem is when the clients use only the free services offered by the venue. The purpose of *strategic seduction* is to *get a client*, but if they do not intend to pay for an individual meeting with a female worker, the time and effort invested in the relationship go to waste:

What gets me angry is that you must be topless. I just don't get it. The fact that they sit here and just drool over us. [...] But you won't always entice a client that way. It's enough for them if they just look. And that's it. That's enough. A pervert will come, stare at us, and that's enough for him, he'll leave, jack off on his own, and that's enough. He won't pay for the room. He got horny, did his job and that's it. [...] But there are also clients that I already know and he always takes the room, but he needs to sit, have a drink and talk to the girls. But there's no doubt that he will go to the room in the end. So, it's no problem. [R53]

According to another unwritten rule, the selection is made only *in the lounge*. Any further changes that are related to a given female worker not earning anything in the end have a negative impact, not only on her financial situation, but also her self-esteem and the relationships in the group:

There was this situation that a guy in the lounge asked, "So, do you want to go, shall we go together?" or something like that. And there was a girl coming out of a room having just been with a client, and he saw that girl, and took the one that was just leaving the room. [pause] And we could see that this first girl felt a little sad about that. But what can you do? It was a little piggish for this guy to do that. [R48]

Violating the rules includes aggressive behavior towards the female workers but also the other clients or workers of the venue. In such situations, the female

workers often decide to stop the *strategic seduction* and *leave the lounge* (cf. Chapter 6).

In the researched venues, the *incidents in the lounge* were also provoked by the female workers. They were usually rooted in what Goffman (1956) termed “flooding out”, i.e., the inability to maintain the appropriate expression in a given interaction. As before, the female workers included in the team played a given role actively, maintaining a frame of the meeting as *fun* for both sides, so this is a kind of “breaking this frame” (Goffman 2010: 44). It is comprised mostly of actions that undermine the already limited authenticity of *the strategic seduction*, i.e., related to failed or unperformed emotional labor (Hochschild 2009) towards a client, expressly showing that the real feelings of a given female worker towards him are completely different to what he thought. This usually (but not only) happens to *the beginning* female workers who have not yet embraced the skills of *strategic seduction* nor have the ability to regulate their emotions. An example of such an action is exemplified by a situation that I witnessed during my observations, when a *beginning* female worker was selected for the first time by a client as a result of a successful interaction *in the lounge*. However, she could not bear the emotional tension and ran out of *the lounge* crying, leaving the other participants with consequences of *the incident*.

For some experienced female workers, *incidents* are usually provoked by women that are under the influence of a psychoactive substance, who instead of *seducing* the clients, laughed at them, leading the interaction in the wrong dramaturgical direction (Goffman 2000: 82). Various ways of humiliating the clients, calling them names, mocking them, or laughing at them, serve to strengthen the female workers group morale (Goffman 2000: 203). However, they are permissible only backstage, where the clients cannot see or hear them. When they are dealing directly with the clients, the teams should show mutual respect towards each other (Goffman 2000: 198). Otherwise, we are faced with an *incident*:

There are some girls here who are unpleasant to the clients, and then that client LEAVES. It's happened quite a few times, I think. I won't name the girls, but they often laughed, and the client just looked at them and left. And he had wanted to pay. Two guys came, and they wanted two girls in one room, but because the girls laughed at them they did not choose them, and they left. They're ridiculous [with disdain], because if a client asks you anything you have to answer politely, with sophistication, with a smile, but for sure not mocking them, laughing or anything like that. But the girls tend to be like that, and they've lost a lot of clients. [R47]

Another source of *incidents* may be the intensifying rivalry among the female workers that gets out of control and takes the form of *hostile actions in the lounge*. Such a situation often occurs when a female worker *takes over a regular client* of her colleague, which triggers strong emotions and a spontaneous response from

the “victim” (e.g. slamming doors, making faces at a client, some epithets). These kinds of actions destroy the atmosphere of light and casual entertainment that was developed by *a team*.

As suggested by the quotes, the reason for numerous *incidents* is alcohol and other psychoactive substances that distort the female worker’s ability to cooperate within a team. In such situations, the team does not act efficiently anymore, as a condition for its efficiency is for each participant to be able to communicate (Goffman 2010: 99):

There are people who simply can’t control themselves, and the worst ones are those who drink, and we have this pathology then. When she’s sober, she’s nice, good, pleasant; but when she drinks, she’s not the same person, meaning she can’t control herself. Then, there’s no cooperation with such a girl, because this guy comes, he doesn’t know whether to stay or not to stay yet, but if you talk, when you entertain him with a person swears every second word, the guy will just look at her and leave. So, there’s no cooperation then. [R32]

4.3. SUMMARY

To sum up the deliberations included in this chapter, the significance of the interactions *in the lounge* should be stressed as a stage for establishing relations between a client and a venue’s female worker. In this phase, she categorizes a man who comes to the agency, and then chooses a strategy of *encouraging* or *discouraging* him from further interaction, and according to the selected line of work (Strauss et al. 1985) she undertakes *strategic seduction* or *work on discouraging the client*. These actions are the individual decisions and efforts of each individual female worker, but they are also part of an ensemble performance carried out by all workers in the agency. Their context is the organizational culture of a given venue and the standards developed within the group of female workers. If the *strategic seduction* is effective, the interaction with a client is carried on *in the room*. However, if any *incidents* emerged during the performance, and they were not mitigated by actions undertaken by the team members, the interaction can be broken (e.g. the female workers can leave *the lounge*, refusing any contact with the client, or the client may leave the agency).

Chapter 5

WORK WITH THE CLIENT *IN THE ROOM*

When *strategic seduction* results in *getting* a particular client, the interaction shifts from *the lounge* to *the room*, and its character changes. This is related to the different features of the place where it is carried out (the public space of *the lounge* versus the intimate space of *the room*), narrowing down the number of participants (instead of teams of female workers and clients, the interaction takes places in a dyad, female worker – client) and a change in the character of the relationship (from *getting* and *seducing* the client to maximizing profits by fulfilling his needs).

A *scenario* of sexual contact in an escort agency is different from the course of non-commercial relations, but also from the commercial ones that take place in other contexts (e.g. in outdoor prostitution). The boundary conditions of the interaction *in the room* are an institutional requirement applicable in a given agency, and they compose a rite of the meeting. Both the clients and female workers must get acquainted with how it will take place. At the beginning, they can feel embarrassment and shame, as the technical and organizational aspects do not allow them to forget the commercial character of this relation. However, the greater the experience of both the female workers and the clients, the greater the freedom in undertaking the institutional pattern. It also emerges in attempts to manipulate it by introducing their own *scenarios* for the meeting. However, before I move on to talk about them, I will present particular dimensions of work with a client *in the room*.

5.1. DIMENSIONS OF WORK WITH THE CLIENT

5.1.1. Scope of the work with the client

5.1.1.1. *Working (with/on) the client's body*

The category of *working with/on a client's body* covers some activities undertaken by the female workers to fulfill the client's needs and fantasies and to develop a proper *erotic atmosphere* for the meeting. This kind of work is commonly perceived as a basic or even the only action carried out by people providing sex services. It is usually identified with sexual intercourse, although the actual course of the meeting requires a much higher level of flexibility in determining the contents of the interactions between the female worker and the client. Meeting

the client's expectations *in the room* can mean having full sexual intercourse or a situation when there is no sex at all (Pheterson 1993). The multidimensionality of the category of *work with/on the client's body* is reflected by the *quasi- and accompanying sexual activities* as well as the *sexual activities*.

The *quasi- and accompanying sexual activities* involve the corporeality of both the client and the female worker, but they are not full sexual intercourse. They are composed of various forms of touching, petting, hugging, and massaging. They might be an introduction to *sexual activities* or only elements of *work with/on a body* during the meeting:

The men like to hug, pet. [...] They are huggers those who come here. [R48]

Me, for example, you know, I also gave a back massage to this guy today, so you know, if he wanted, he had it. I can do that. He said that I could massage him like that for an hour. [R40]

Performing *quasi- and accompanying sexual activities* in meetings with clients is advantageous for the female worker for a number of reasons. Having additional skills, e.g., massaging, gives a woman a competitive advantage over her coworkers. It is also an additional asset when negotiating the size of the tip with a client. Performing those activities takes up some time, and it also allows them to shorten the *strictly* sexual activities. Therefore, a worker can retain more energy for any potential interactions with other clients on a given day.

Sexual activities cover a whole spectrum of positions that the female workers offer to the clients during a *standard meeting*, or for an extra charge. The men who purchase sexual services often assume that the women who provide them have a great need for sexual stimuli, and they simply crave an intensive sex life. The female workers maintain this image during interactions *in the lounge* (cf. Sanders 2005b: 329). However, during the meeting *in the room*, it is most important for them to negotiate an advantageous set of sex services that will allow them to restrict fatigue while at the same time allowing them to obtain the highest profits possible. The group of activities offered to the clients includes *standard services* (usually including those that a woman knows from her own sexual experience), and *non-standard* ones. The latter often trigger disgust and objection from *the beginning* female workers, as they go beyond what they believe to be a sex standard (although it may mean something different for each of them):

So, this guy came once, and it was when I was beginning in prostitution, I had no experience in it, I was even a little scared generally. And this German guy comes, one of my first clients, in a leather mask. And he comes to the room, normally, but when he dressed in the room he stayed in a mask, and he wanted like bondage or something, so, I'm like, "What's going on?" Although it was like four years ago, I can still remember the impression it made on me. [R14]

In venues where the female workers have the possibility to *selectively choose clients* and to abandon a meeting if they do not want to perform any *non-standard sexual activities*, the *beginners* usually do so. However, this initial definite reluctance may get weaker over time. This is related to a process of *normalization of non-standard sexual services*, which results from anticipatory socialization in the group of female workers. Also, the financial aspect is of great importance here, as the non-standard activities are additionally well-paid (at least some of them). A female worker can quickly find out that if she does not offer any *extras*, she significantly limits the group of clients interested in her services.

5.1.1.2. Parapsychological work

The *parapsychological work* is composed of actions related to fulfilling the client's social needs: getting closer to him, attachment, love, friendship, affection, acceptance, and recognition in their own eyes and those of others (cf. *sentimental work*, Strauss et al. 1985). Although meeting social needs in an escort agency may be considered impossible, for a few clients, the sex workers are an easily available group of companions that does not demand any actions related to maintaining a relationship and they are always ready to meet. In exchange for a charge, the women adopt a role they are expected to play, filling in the gaps in the network of social relationships of clients. Therefore, the *parapsychological work* is usually (but not always) of a strategic character, and it does not come from the sensitivity or empathy of the female workers. However, during an interaction, it should be presented in the most authentic manner possible.

While characterizing the *parapsychological work*, it should be stressed that a visit to an agency is a kind of a social meeting for some clients, in a specific, erotic atmosphere, and it is not necessarily related to sexual intercourse:

You know, because it's like since we're prostitutes, then we have sex. But I have a few clients that I actually don't have sex with here. I just sit and talk, you know. If a client comes to me, he wants to lie down, you know, hug a little, talk, etc. They think that if I have five clients a day I need to have sex five times a day. Not necessarily. There are guys who sit and talk about their uncles, aunts, grandmas, wives, you know? [R2]

A dominant action within the scope of *parapsychological work* is *listening* to stories about everyday life problems (often in the form of *sad tales*; Goffman 2011: 148) and *comforting* the client (cf. *sentimental work*; Strauss et al. 1985). This is when a sex worker adopts one of two roles: a discrete stranger that you can entrust with your concerns without any worries because you will never see her again, or someone close (especially in the case of *regular clients*), who becomes a confessor and comforter. Some researchers even think that in this latter case the

female workers adopt the role of a listening and uplifting mother (Grenz 2005: 2105), which is confirmed to some extent in the gathered interviews:

I sometimes think that they need a conversation, compassion, for someone to take pity. Like big children. Seriously, like big children. He comes to get it off his chest, because his wife, this and that. And what will I tell him? But you are still going to think things. [R34]

There are these guys who come here, they want to get it off their chest, talk about their problems, you know, so you hug them, pet them. So, he knows he's not rejected, he's noticed by someone, you know? He's got this feeling of security that he can come again, and he knows he won't be rejected. You just need to know the male mentality. [R35]

As long as the client is paying, he can expect the female worker to listen to his stories politely. Even if this was a non-commercial relationship, his behavior would already be classified as "whining," exceeding acceptable boundaries and threatening to break the interaction. In contrast to the relatives and friends of a given male, the female worker does not respond emotionally, does not criticize or preach. Regardless of what she hears, she has no pretensions and shows some interest in his issues. Thus, she is the perfect listener:

You always need to have a method for such people, a little bit of psychology. When I go, the clients always leave happy, because they tell me, "You're so nice." Because I simply listen a lot, and when they ask me something, I can answer, but I also listen a lot. I don't get on my soapbox, I don't give any advice unless he wants to hear some from me; then I can tell him something, but I'm not like, "You're doing this or that wrong." Because it's obvious his wife does that at home. So, if I keep griping to him...it's like, he shouldn't get the same thing both at home and in the agency. [R32]

The clients often expect some mutuality from their partners during such conversations, asking about their experiences and life situations. The female workers with more experience present *the manufactured identity* in such cases (Sanders 2005b: 328). It is composed of a nickname, a fictional life story from childhood to current times, and some side threads, selected in such a manner as to match the expectations and the course of the interaction with a given man. Therefore, if there is such a need, a female worker can communicate different information to different clients regarding her education, family situation, but also, e.g., sexual preferences. Hence, she minimizes the risk related to the client being able to use the obtained information in bad faith. This is how a female worker creates an appropriate image which fulfills the expectations of a given client (e.g. making the female worker more interesting, Pasko 2002: 59). At the same time, thanks to obtaining some information about the female worker's personal life, the client

sees a meeting with her as more individualized, unique (Frank 2002: 192). This may incline some clients to choose the same partner again.

Another dimension of *parapsychological work* is *increasing the client's confidence*. This is usually reflected in various forms of complimenting the client's external appearance, sexual skills (also by faking orgasms) and life choices (e.g. choice of car, how he deals with coworkers, etc.):

Just tell him that!!! That he is great! You need to tell it to them, anything, to kill some time, "You smell so nice," or anything. And then I say to myself, "You so and so!" [laughter]. [R34]

The female workers often make use of this kind of client expectation, to make fun of him in a way he cannot notice (thus, with impunity). In this way, they break the monotony of the work, but they also develop a feeling of control over the course of the interaction:

E: His shirt is like ten years old, and I'm like, "What a great shirt!" Because you know, the guy gives you money, so you have a different approach! Because you know you have this money in your wallet, so you're happy, so you're like, "You have a beautiful shirt," and I remember that my brother had one of those eight years ago, because they were fashionable back then.

D: And I'm like, "You're a stud, it felt so good," and you're like, "D., you won't even need to use your vibrator today" [laughter].

E: You know, on purpose, and he's like, I'm telling you.

D: "Are you joking?" And we say, "NOT AT ALL! We really haven't had such a client here before!" [...] We just made fun of that guy, who really neither looked attractive nor had a nice shirt, but we said that it was great! He walked out of there a few inches taller! [laughter]. [from observation]

According to my interviewees, complimenting a client is a highly effective technique for directing the course of interactions, which corresponds to the findings of social psychology – we like those who like us, and we often follow their persuasions (Cialdini 2003: 161; cf. *strategic interaction*, Goffman 1969). This kind of action usually results in a higher tip and also continuing the relationship with a client over the longer term. During the next visit, he may choose that female worker who found him so attractive in the past. Therefore, undertaking some *psychological work* is a strategy for maximizing profits for numerous female workers:

When it comes to the clients, they PREFER girls that they can talk to, and some of them need to be understood, they mumble that it's tough in their company, his partners or workers pissed him off, and then it's like, "Of course [with care] it's a torment for you! Poor you!" And they're happy. You need to find the key to each client, an approach. First of all, listen a lot. [R32]

The *parapsychological work* is also an element of the competitive advantage towards the female workers who do not undertake it. The slightly older female workers, with lower bodily capital, expressed an especially strong motivation to carry it out but also that it was highly effective (cf. Sanders 2005b: 330). Regarding their life and professional experience, they were often characterized by high interpersonal and communicative skills, were more patient, and could meet the clients' expectations in that scope to a higher degree. Therefore, they often specialized in meetings with men who sought experiences that I described as *parapsychological work*:

A client once waited two hours to meet me, and then spent four hours because he wanted to talk to me. I attract people who want to talk, need warmth, because each girl attracts different clients. [R9]

In turn, *the beginning* female workers often had some problems with doing this kind of work. One reason could be their increased focus on their own emotions and feelings, very intensive in the first period of work in the agency. *The beginners* were often too embarrassed to initiate a conversation with a client, and they did not always know what to ask about and how to respond to what he said. Therefore, the *parapsychological work* requires a certain level of practice that the female worker adopts along with the experience gained during meetings in the agency. At the same time, as noted by Hughes (1958: 88), the women who provide sex services, like psychiatrists, need to make the effort not to get excessively involved in personal terms in their client's issues. Therefore, interactions *in the room* require emotional labor (Hochschild 2009) to deal with the emotions that are triggered by the client's words and actions. This task was often difficult, even for the more experienced female workers:

So, this guy is so exhausting, because I don't drink alcohol, so sit there and listen to him. Because when he comes, the topics are the same, they are boring, I'm fed up with it. I know his ins and outs. Why do I have to listen to it for a year or a year and a half?? I hear the same things every time we meet! I sit with him for five hours, seven hours, and I hear the same things he said during the first hour, the same things that he said two months and a year ago! All the same! [...] He just drinks and drinks, and he can do nothing, but you know, he throws this money around, so what would you do? Wouldn't you sit for like six hours? And you leave with such a thick purse! So, what would you do? Fucking awesome, right? [...] The worst type is the guy that you need to listen to, but he is somehow troublesome [discouraged]. I don't know, he has these problems with his family, and you sit and listen like a psychologist. And you've had enough, you've just had enough, because you've got your own life, your own problems, but you still need to listen to that moaner. [R3]

What is interesting, according to some female workers, is that the stories told by the clients about their troubles and miseries were a premise for their strategic

actions, intended to make a specific impression. This is how a client tried to *soften* the female worker, to elicit some sympathy and encourage her to treat him more subjectively. This action corresponds with the same strategy adopted by the female workers towards the clients. From this perspective, the *parapsychological work* is seen as a game, providing benefits to both parties. While increasing the client's confidence, the female worker feels appreciated and needed themselves, or satisfied with the fun she makes out of him. In turn, the client is treated in a way that he desired. Both parties may, but do not have to be aware of the strategic dimension of those interactions. It depends to a great extent on their experience in the world of sex services and the course of previous meetings.

5.1.1.3. Negotiating the scope of work with the client

Negotiating the scope of work can be considered in two dimensions. Usually, this refers to a selection of services in *work with/on a body* and *parapsychological work* that suits not only the client but also the female worker. Additionally, negotiations also refer to the proportion of both kinds of work within a single meeting. As a result, the female worker provides the client with feelings of intimacy and emotional connectedness and/or fulfills some erotic fantasies, adopting the role of sex object (Pasko 2002).

Negotiations of the scope of work take place over the whole course of the interaction *in the room*. Although a client declares the expected services at the beginning of the meeting (and pays for them), he can change his mind at any given moment, under the influence of his own fantasies or persuaded by the partner. Therefore, the female workers divided the clients into *decided*, who knew what kind of experiences they were looking for (so the scope of negotiations was somewhat limited) and *undecided*. In the latter case, the course of the meeting was agreed on an ongoing basis, along with the evolution of the client's needs or their effective stimulation/quenching by the sex workers. The women intended to make the men adopt sexual positions that were related to the least possible physical effort or unpleasant experiences for them and allowed the man to reach an orgasm as quickly as possible. These actions result from the specificity of the working conditions. Assuming that a female worker can accept several clients in a single shift, she should distribute her energy appropriate. She also should not have sex in positions that could cause any bruising or pain in her sex organs, hindering further work or rendering it impossible. It is a specific type of *agency OHS* that *the beginning* female workers are usually not aware of. During the interviews, they frequently mentioned their mistakes in the first work period, which involved *not negotiating the scope of services* and performing everything that was expected by the client. This resulted in some health problems and psychological trauma. Therefore, the group of skills necessary for a female worker includes assertiveness, negotiation skills, and the ability to find some appropriate arguments and present them appropriately, to encourage the client to change his expectations.

On the other hand, the female workers tried to encourage the client to purchase *extra services*, exceeding the agency's *standard offer*. These were usually oral sex services without a condom, and kissing (contrary to common belief, many interviewees offered this service for an extra charge), as well as any potential *non-standard services*. A female worker usually tried to convince a client that if he buys those services, his sensations during the meeting will be significantly enhanced. A detailed offer was adjusted each and every time to a particular client and modified according to the course of the interaction *in the room*.

A key matter for successful negotiations is to *keep one's boundaries*. Limiting some sex services makes sense only when a female worker does not allow the client to force them. It is difficult because, as it can be concluded based on the interviews, some clients do not accept the information that a female worker will refuse to provide certain sex services, and attempts to encourage her to change the decision in various ways:

I ALWAYS say, "Do you have any principles in your life"? "I do." "I do too. I don't do this and this and this." And that's the end of the conversation, and I'm like, "Why are you even arguing with me"? [...] Some girls do anal, but I don't. One guy laid even 2000 zlotys on the table once, but I was like, "Listen to me, IT DOES NOTHING for me, I DON'T DO that. AND THAT'S IT." "But here, take it." And I'm like, "I DON'T WANT IT. Don't you understand?" "But try it." And he keeps convincing you. And this is most annoying, you say to him, "No," and he says "But let's try." And I'm like, "Or maybe I could poke you in your butt? And we'll see how much fun it is." And they let it go. [...] It is just the matter of message, it depends on what a girl is like. There are these girls that will cry a little, leave, etc. But I'm like: "You don't like it? You've got two minutes to get out." [R20]

Analogous negotiations are related to using a condom, as numerous clients expect sex without protection:

I'm a direct person, so if I don't like anything, I just say it immediately. "Listen, that's right, you paid, but you didn't pay FOR ME! I offer this and that, but NOTHING MORE! Don't count on anything more." It's simple! Because there's some stuff that I WON'T DO! There's no way. Phone calls asking about sex without protection are regular, I already got used to them, DESPITE the fact that if I answer such a call, I always ask, "Are you sure about what you're saying? Have you considered this?" I'm like, "Don't you think about diseases? Don't you consider it? Don't you know that this is good both for me and you that we use a condom?" [R36]

As previously mentioned, the female workers also try to influence how much time during the meeting *in the room* should be occupied by particular kinds of work. A typical action undertaken by the interviewees was to initiate and prolong

the conversations with clients as well as all forms of *parapsychological work* and *accompanying sexual activities*, so there is as little time for the sexual intercourse as possible:

I just enter the room and play, play a good role. I chat him up, I chat him up so much that sometimes we have only 15 minutes to the end. So, then it's like, "So, let's finish quickly" [laughter]. I'm so good at chatting them up. The men. It's good for me, I just talk and talk [laughter], I offer him a drink, this or that. Some time will always pass. [R41]

This strategy allows the women to earn money with the minimum involvement in the *sexual activities*:

I'll tell you that when you go to the room, the sex is not always guaranteed. You can sometimes wrap this client around your little finger that there's no sex. [...] When you approach a client nicely, politely, he doesn't yell or anything. It's cultural. The same situation was when I went to clients' houses. It was the same. Sometimes there was no sex, we just sat, talked, laughed, I did some oral, so there was something. But I took an hour, two hours, I extended it a little. So, I wrapped this client around my little finger, and I had a client for an hour, but I sat there like three or four hours. He extended it. [laughter]. [R47]

However, it should be stressed that for some female workers, the *parapsychological work* is so mentally burdensome that they prefer "regular" sex instead.

5.1.2. Negotiating the level of earnings

The earnings of women who work in agencies are comprised of several elements: about half of the standard charge that the client pays for a meeting with a female worker, additional payments for extra services, tips, and (in some venues) "commission" for encouraging the clients to purchase alcohol or non-alcoholic beverages and cigarettes. Hence, despite the fact that an hourly rate for time with a female worker is permanent and non-negotiable, how much she actually earns depends on her negotiating skills. Also, the number of drinks and types of additional services that the female worker succeeds in convince a client to purchase influence the level of earnings. It is often the case that these additional charges are several times higher than the amounts she obtains for "her" part of the hourly rate.

A basic action intended to increase earnings is to *trick clients* into buying some additional sex services. From the female workers' perspective, it is effective to ration the highest number of sexual activities possible that a client can be expected to pay for. It is not always understandable for people who manage the ven-

ue or the clients, or even for *the beginning* workers, who find sexual intercourse to be an integral whole which includes fondling, kissing, touching and various sex positions. In the case of an escort agency, sexual intercourse is divided into elements (which are priced), and then re-composed without taking into account those activities that the client did not pay for. Therefore, sexual intercourse is perceived as a *sequence of activities* that the client bought and the woman agreed to perform. Such an approach seems artificial for *the beginning* sex workers; thus, they find it tough to accept it. However, in the case of more experienced women, a venue which accepts an elaborate system for obtaining additional profits is a highly advantageous workplace:

If one girl works in such a place, it's not so easy to earn, but here there's a charge for everything. The girls get money for virtually everything, and I think that's a reasonable solution. [R15]

The female workers can also increase their profits if, thanks to *pragmatic acceptance*, they can agree on common principles of informing the clients about the price list. In such a situation, they are able (against *the boss's* will) to demand that clients pay for activities that should be included in the *standard*:

There's a hot tub, I mean that's included, but the girls always make something up that you need to pay for it, e.g., 100 zlotys, if there's a client who doesn't know that. So, you can earn there. [R15]

The sex workers also employ a series of techniques allowing them to encourage a client to buy some extra services and/or to leave a tip. One of them is *creating needs* that can be fulfilled for an additional charge. For this purpose, the women propose the provision of additional services thanks to which the client has fuller sensations, he can get an erection more easily, etc. This allows the women to convince men to use some additional service, even those who were not interested in it at the beginning:

D: You need to act a little here. You need to be up to something, if you want to earn money you can convince the client during the meeting, and you will still earn it, because he wishes something more. And he says "NO" at the beginning, that he doesn't want any extras or anything.

E: But we make something up, there is no erection, you know, it might be because of the condom, maybe we'll try it without a condom, and then he pulls out the money.

D: There is, of course, oral sex without a condom, because there's no question about having regular sex without a condom. [from observation]

Another way to *trick* the clients into leaving a tip is to pay him compliments and play the stereotypical role of a submissive woman:

E: You can have like nine to ten thousand per month here. But you need to KNOW how to do it.

D: You need to talk well in the room.

E: You need to want to earn money. KNOW HOW to earn it. SQUEEZE IT OUT of the client, PULL IT OUT. Get him going, convince him.

D: You sometimes need to be so ARROGANT. When I sometimes see that a client is a little drunk or something, I say it directly, “Let me earn something [sweet voice – note by I.Ś.], won’t you let me earn some money, honey? You tiger, you lover boy, what is this 100 zlotys for you honey?” ... or 50 or anything. “No, I don’t have it.” “Come on, give me it.” And eventually, you can convince him. “Fine, here you are.” And there is one that won’t give you it, he just says “no” and that’s it. He won’t give you any, this Scrooge. And I’m like, “What a sly fox you are.” “At least leave me the change.” “No.” And I’m like, “Why?” “Because!” [from observations]

I witnessed numerous times during my observations (also involuntarily, e.g., by hearing a conversation through a closed door) in how many variants the female workers employed this technique: from convincing a client submissively, humbly and patiently, not bothering with him grumbling, through various forms of ingratiating, to simulating fascination, which was intended to encourage the client to be more generous.

Another technique, and very often an effective one for *conning* a client, is to *make him feel sorry* for the female worker. It is grounded in a *sad tale* (Goffman 2011) which should trigger some sympathy in the client. This tale must include a clear message about the female worker’s financial problem and a more or less subtle implication about expecting some help from the client. In such a situation, a man, while leaving a big tip, can feel appreciated, as a person who helps or who provides support:

And you know, when K. comes to me, once every two months, let’s say, he’s got the money, very nice, a lot of money. Once, for example, he went to the cash machine, because he always takes three hours, he sits a little, goes to the cash machine and takes another four hours, and he gave me five hundred for nothing. And he’s like, “I’m going to the cash machine; how much do you want?” And I’m like, “Well, 500 zlotys,” and I fool him all the time that I have these loans, debts, I want to buy this, but I don’t have any money, you know. I’m poor and everything, I make him feel sorry for me, so, “Bring me like 500 zlotys, because I need to make a payday loan payment today,” or something. So, I open the door because I saw him through the monitoring system, and he puts 500 zlotys inside my bra. [R3]

To make the *sad tales* effective, they cannot be “excessively sad,” as this would repel the clients, destroying the atmosphere appropriate for an escort agency (which should, after all, be of fun and erotic carelessness):

You know, you take this money from clients, from their own hands. “Listen sunshine, why are you so sad today?” “What, don’t you know how it is? I’ve got some

bills to pay, and they stole from me” let’s say. But I’m not so bad, because there are some girls who say things like, “My God, my son is sick, and in hospital,” and they always..., you know... And I’m like, “Don’t tell him [with discouragement – note by I.Ś.] that stuff because he’s got HIS OWN problems, he’s got this WIFE waiting for him at home. He comes here to offload to YOU.” There was this girl who worked here, and she cried all the time. She was always sick, cried, and the clients ran off. [R20]

Another technique is to convince a client that a tip is an obligatory element of the agency’s services, where it is just *unseemly* to pay just for *the standard*. Therefore, leaving a tip, or at least buying a drink for himself and a female worker, is intended to be a principal in the agency’s *etiquette*:

You know what, the extras are like a relative notion. They might be the same, but if you feel the client, you know that he can give you even more. [...] You know, I DON’T DO MANY extras, because firstly I don’t like it, and secondly, I’m too old already, and I don’t feel like doing it, let those younger girls do the extras. And I simply say, “Give me something for a beer. What, you’ll leave me without a tip? Where are you? In a brothel or an escort agency?” [laughter – note by I.Ś.] So, I disarm some of them. [R20]

Conning the clients into buy drinks was a basic method adopted by the female workers to increase their profits. It was possible thanks to their obtaining commission from their sales. Within the researched venues, alcohol was up to ten times more expensive than in pubs or restaurants, so this commission was a significant amount. Additionally, *plying a client with alcohol* is also a technique that *softens a client*, not allowing him to control his expenses, and making him incapable of using the sex services:¹

If they are drunk and like in a stupor, you can get everything out of him. They sometimes also go to a cash machine, and they pay you, he spends everything, gets sober in the morning and grabs his head in disbelief. But we had this gangster, there were three of us in the room with him [...] and he got so drunk later that he gave us his credit card, the PIN number, and said, “Go and take the money out because I don’t know what limit I have today, take it all, whatever you can, and we’ll be sitting here for the whole time it can pay for.” [R32]

Highly interesting relations can be observed in the interactions between the female workers and foreign clients, especially if there is a language barrier. They adopt identical techniques towards each other – each party “understands” just as

¹ The same technique is also employed by clients in relation to the female workers, so they are incapable of controlling the course of interaction *in the room*.

much as is necessary to reach their goals. The female workers often provide an exaggerated rate to maximize their profits, but when agreeing on the scope of services, they pretend not to understand the client, especially if he wants anything that they would rather not do. In turn, the client accepts the rate, but not the information about any extra charge:²

They're polite, have a lot of money, it's hard to get an extra charge from them because they never understand, but when you tell them the rate, they get it, but when you tell them about the extra charge, they don't get it [laughter]. [R53]

It depends on the client what you tell him, because, for example, in Szczecin, there lots of Germans, and the Germans have totally different rates than the Poles. The Poles paid like 120 zlotys for an hour when I was there, and the Germans like 200 zlotys or 50 Euros. So, you knew that if he was a German, the rates would be higher. [R20]

The amount of money that the female worker can count on impacts her level of involvement when dealing with clients. This relationship was noticed by the interviewees who stated it directly numerous times: "The more money the client leaves, the nicer we are." This increased involvement in the interaction results both from the principle of mutuality and some raised hopes for even higher profits that may result from playing out the interaction with the client properly. It also results from reassurance and relaxation, resulting from the certainty of financial gain:

It's obvious that when a client leaves additionally like 100 zlotys, we are way nicer. When he leaves 200 zlotys, we're nicer, and if it's like 300 zlotys we're even nicer. It's obvious. I'm with a guy, I've got 50 zlotys from this, he's got his high expectations, so I'm not too nice. [R2]

Therefore, while planning a visit in the venue, the men prepare an appropriately higher amount, which – they believe – will motivate the female workers to play their roles with greater involvement. On the other hand, this effect can be also used by the clients to manipulate the female worker. The clients can make some strategic suggestions or promise tips, without intending to actually pay for them. Some external attributes of status are also employed for this purpose (outfit, thick wallet, cf. subchapter 4.1.1).

While striving to maximize the profit, the female worker must consider not only the current but also any potential future interactions with the client. Hence, actions intended to *con* the client can adopt a different shape regarding the female worker's evaluation of the probability of him visiting the venue again. If

² This may result from *purposeful misunderstanding*, but also the differences in how the sex business is organized in various countries.

he seems to be a random guest (e.g. he's traveling through town, he rarely visits agencies, etc.), the female workers try to maximize the benefits here and now (e.g. by "bleeding" the clients from all the money he's got with him). However, if they suspect that a client may come back, they are ready to limit their financial expectations, therefore investing in the interaction that is intended to bring more profits in the future.

Finally, it should be stressed that the described techniques are not always effective. Like the female workers trying not to be persuaded by the clients, if it is not compliant with their interest, some clients (especially those with some greater experience in using the agency's services) can also resist the techniques for maximizing profits adopted by the female workers, by *dodging*:

There are these smart asses who already know that the girls can pull the money out of them, that might have been a victim several times, so they won't let it happen. [R32]

Despite the fact that the female workers adopt such a broad pallet of techniques that serve to *con* the clients, they are not merely passive recipients of the described actions. The *regulars* of the agency also adopt (more or less consciously) certain tricks to reduce the costs of a meeting and maximize their profits. Usually, they attempt to shift the moment of payment to the end of the meeting, so it is easier to avoid it or negotiate a discount:

There are also those scammers, we arrange for, let's say, a certain amount, and when he gives me the money right away, I put it in my makeup bag. But there was one time I didn't ask for the money right away, but at the end, [...] we had arranged for a hundred zlotys, and he put 50 on the table, and said, "It'll be alright," and I'm like, "But we agreed differently." "But I don't have it." So, what could I do? [R5]

A way that makes such practices impossible is an absolute order to get the money *in advance*, as soon as the interaction *in the room* begins. However, the clients often try to bargain and negotiate a discount at the applicable rate, which is met with a definite objection from the female workers. The financial negotiations in the agency, especially *in the room*, should be understood as acting towards maximizing the profits by the female workers, and not as their willingness to reduce the price:

If they sometimes try to bargain with us, we're like, "Where are you, at Z. train station?³ Go there and you'll pay twenty zlotys." Or, "Do you think you're at a market and you can haggle, or where? Pay or don't pay." "Why must you be like that? You could drop the price." "When I open my own place, I might drop the price for you. But right now, I only work here." [R20]

³ At the above-mentioned train station, street sex workers offer sex services for a small charge.

However, it must be admitted that the situation of reducing the prices for extra services does happen, especially for *regular clients* or those that the female worker wants to encourage for another visit (cf. Prus, Irini 1988: 20). Such actions are perceived by female coworkers as *unfair competition* and combated, e.g., by setting a common price list, and employing sanctions and *hostile actions* towards those who violate these arrangements (cf. Chapter 3.2):

There are some cracks when the girls provide some services and they don't charge extra, or they do something that YOU DON'T DO. [...] It's mostly things like the men will say, "Listen, do this without a condom, for example, oral without a condom, but I'm not paying extra." And I'm like, "What? So, you won't have it." "But she did it like that." And I'm like, "Listen, do I look like her?" "You don't." "So, get out your money." So, then you go to that girl and say, "Listen, your little client just said this." You know, the girls swear they don't, but you know, I know who does what. [R20]

While striving to reduce the meeting costs, the clients also adopt a series of techniques that are based on the same mechanisms as those adopted by the female workers. One of the most effective is to simulate emotional involvement, being in love. During a meeting, a client declares his feeling for a female worker, compliments her, gives her money or gifts, or makes plans for the future. Furthermore, he often mentions it publicly, e.g., in the presence of other workers at the venue, which is flattering for a given woman and increases her prestige in the group. However, it is usually a strategic action, intended to guarantee free sexual intercourse, in the role of the partner of a given woman. It was quite a surprising conclusion from the observations that this technique often turned out to be effective, despite the fact that the female workers were aware of its existence. However, they saw its strategic dimension towards their female coworkers definitely more clearly than towards themselves.

5.1.3. Negotiating the duration of the meeting

As in the case of the price of a meeting, at first glance, it seems that its duration is strictly determined and subject only to some minor modifications. However, the female workers have many possibilities to manipulate it and adjust it to their own expectations.

The time frame of the meeting *in the room* is determined by the client, deciding whether to pay for the whole night together, a couple of hours, one hour, half an hour or a quarter. The meeting has also a *temporary order* of hygienic actions and the negotiated sex services. Before the *work with/on the client's body* takes place, the female worker must fill in a log book and prepare the room for the meeting (bringing, e.g., bed linen, a towel). In the meantime, the client should wash. The female worker also goes to refresh herself. Not until these activities

finish does the proper interaction take place, although the time counts down from the moment the client finds himself *in the room*. This is often a point of contention with the men, who would like to use the paid time to fulfill their needs:

The worst client is a guy, who is forty or so, and it's his first time in an escort agency, and his worldview is based on the movies. I once had this guy, who argued with me that when he took a shower, and it's like I don't know, a quarter past midnight, this is when we start to count the time down. So, I'm like that we start to count the time down when I enter the room with him, and I don't care if he takes a shower for half an hour or an hour, right? And he says, what if he took a shower for like two hours? But is this a bathhouse or something? [laughing] [R2]

The end of the meeting is determined by the service worker who knocks on the door or calls on the female worker's mobile phone, suggesting that the client should prepare himself to leave.

The described *temporary order* of the interaction can be modified thanks to the actions of the sex workers. Two main strategies related to the female workers taking control of the meeting time are *shortening* and *extending* it. I also observed a *mixed strategy* during my research, when a female worker chose (e.g. as a result of initial categorization and observation of the client *in the lounge*) a specific mode of action but decided to change her approach during the meeting.

The *meeting times were shortened* usually when the female worker was forced to adopt a *non-selective strategy to choose* a client and wanted to get rid of him as quickly as possible (cf. Chapter 4). It was also employed with clients who were not too wealthy, who could not afford to buy drinks, extras, or pay for tips. The case was similar if the venue was popular, so the chances of getting another client were high. Then the female workers made an effort to finish the interaction as quickly as possible and go back *to the lounge* (cf. Collins 2014: 229):

There are some girls who want to do it as quickly as possible, and goodbye. To get it over with it. I sometimes take the risk and do it when I see that there's some traffic, so to go to another client as quickly as possible, not to extend it, so I take the risk, deal with it quickly and then give him air. Or when it's finished, I go down, supposedly for a cigarette, and I would talk to the girls. When the traffic's high you just want to give the client some air quickly, so he gets out, but if nothing happens he can sit a little [laughter]. [R33]

For financial reasons, this strategy is advantageous for a given woman, but not necessarily for her coworkers, as it elevates the general level of rivalry in the venue.

The female workers also try to *shorten the meeting time* with troublesome, "yamming," drunk or aggressive clients. In such cases, the security workers or bartenders also take part in the manipulation. This is particularly true if the clients

are under the influence of psychoactive substances, and the probability that they will notice those actions and complain about them, requiring compensation, is rather small. From the perspective of the venue's managers, it is important to find a balance between satisfying the female workers who want to be with a troublesome client as short as possible, and satisfying the client, who should not become discouraged by the venue:

D: M. came drunk yesterday. We know he's got the money and he always takes several hours with one girl here.

E: And this is when the boss shortens the time, because if he's drunk, he doesn't know how the time passes anyway.

D: And that's nice! Then there's like half an hour, 40 minutes, the boss knocks and, oh, it's already been an hour.

E: And the next one and the next one. [from observation]

It may also happen that it is the client who is not interested in a longer meeting, and he just leaves the venue when he has already fulfilled his need. This is the desired situation from the perspective of most of the interviewees:

It depends on the client, on the man. Because when I was still a call girl, I went to the client for an hour, but I was virtually seven minutes at his place, and we had sex, everything happened in seven minutes [laughter]. [R47]

On the other hand, there are also some clients, *the regulars of the agency*, who know the tricks employed by the female workers, and take suitable preventive measures, not allowing any manipulations with the meeting time. Therefore, adopting *the shortening strategy* depends on whether a client is assessed as non-demanding or the other way around:

There are these guys who come here and will not even lie down because they are paying for an hour, so there must be an hour of sex. You may or may not cheat him by five minutes. When I see that he sets the alarm on his phone, then oh my, I'm screwed. I immediately know that it's pointless to try it with that guy. [R34]

However, it should be noted that according to some unwritten rules of agency work, the time in the venue passes quite differently, and the client should not count every minute –in contrast to the female workers. They are not willing to extend the meeting even for several minutes without an extra charge, although they generally accept shortening the time without paying the difference back to the client.

The opposite strategy is *extending the meeting*, i.e. encouraging a client to pay for another hour and remain with the female worker *in the room*, after the paid time lapses. It is usually employed towards clients who do not cause any problems while negotiating rates and the scope of services, as well as during pe-

riods of low *traffic* in the venue. In such situations, it is advantageous to *extend* the meeting, and hence to maximize the profits, as it may be risky to wait for another client.

One technique for *extending the meeting* is to lead an interaction in such a manner that allows a woman not to “make it” in fulfilling the sexual needs of a given client:

We try to make him pay for another hour, do it so he doesn't have an orgasm, so he can still get this next hour, right? [R10]

However, the additional time is usually not intended for *sexual activities*. On the contrary, *work with/on the body* is often limited by the female workers to the necessary minimum and replaced with *parapsychological work* or some *side activities*. This trend can be observed from the first moments of the meeting, when the female workers *play for time*, taking their time going *to the room* after they were *selected*. During the client's shower, my interviewees not only prepared for the meeting but also smoked cigarettes, walked around the venue, and spoke with me or the other agency workers. As a result, they went to the client, who was waiting for them *in the room*, after as much as ten or fifteen minutes.

You prolong it the most when he's showering, I need to go get the bed sheets, so as to prolong it as much as I can, then I go to take a shower, so you can have like 10–15 minutes from this hour. And then, you can drag everything out. Although I don't smoke, when I see that a guy is awful, ok, let's smoke, or I go down to get some drinks, so it takes as long as possible. [R33]

Delaying also covers some *side activities* undertaken during the meeting. They are related to prolonging those aspects of the meetings that allow the women to suspend the interaction with the client, so to actually shorten the time spent with him. In turn, skillfully performing *parapsychological work* allows them to minimize the time devoted to *sexual activities* while at the same time *extending* the meeting:

We try to chat them up for as long as possible [laughter], so the time passes [laughter]. There are these clients that can be chatted up [laughter]. And what he does, where he works, they tell you all of this stuff. And when he starts on a topic, we try to drag it out for as long as we can [laughter]. [R10]

As this colleague of mine says, “It's not about working, it's about earning.” Usually, you need to have the gift of the gab, you need to know how to chat someone up nicely, and, you know, ask about different stuff. I tell them rhymes, jokes, you know, to take as much time as I can. [R34]

Extending the meeting is especially easy to perform in the case of clients who treat the venue as a place of fun. They usually do not control the passing time (and money):

There was this P. once, who came from Ireland. So, he partied with his friend, and this friend took one girl to the room and went away, and this guy took three girls. And then he told us to go down and ask all the free colleagues, and it ended up like there were eight of us with this one guy. It was just about having fun. The taxi guy went back and forth to buy *Johnnie Walker*. And these girls were already so smashed, but what, eight girls in the room, every hour is 200 zlotys. And you know, you don't need to torture yourself with some old beggar, he got drunk, laughed, he wanted to stay after five, but unfortunately the daily limit was exceeded, and he had 12,000, so you can guess how much he left. So, the security guys were so happy that they gave him a 0.7 liter bottle of *Johnnie Walker* when he was leaving, and this doesn't happen! But they earned so much on him! [R32]

In parallel with the technique of *extending the meeting*, the female workers also adopt the technique of *getting the clients drunk*, especially with those who fall asleep after alcohol, as presented by previous experiences:

A: If he's drunk, he'll fall asleep. "Honey, the hour is almost over." So, he gives me 150 zlotys for another hour. Then this second hour lapses, so he gives money for the third one. Ok, sleep my love. If you want to pay 150 zlotys for one hour of sleeping, feel free to sleep! One guy once wanted to sleep for eight hours [laughter]. And I thought, one hour ends, and he gives the money for another one [laughter].

I: And what, he left in the morning? And he said nothing?

A: Yeah, he did! He played the field, of course he did, because of where he was, in a brothel, so how could he not play the field? He did, he just can't remember [laughter]. [R34]

However, this strategy is connected with a certain risk that a drunk client will behave aggressively. In such a situation, instead of a trouble-free interaction, the female worker is forced to turn to work safety principles (cf. Chapter 6).

5.1.4. Work on the relationship

Randall Collins, stressing how women who provide sex services undertake negotiations, put forward a thesis that they behave like a utilitarian actor in game theory. Because it is a purely selfish exchange⁴ on both sides, attention is focused

⁴ However, based on the collected material, one might wonder whether this thesis is not too strict. The female workers did not always follow just the selfish motivation, although in such situation, as observed by Collins, their negotiating position was weaker. This issue seems to be an interesting thread for further research.

on negotiating the fee and limiting the scope of services (Collins 2014: 229). Collins notices that the more calculating the attitude of the woman, the stronger her position when negotiating with clients. However, he also argues that even if a client is inclined only towards a selfish sexual pleasure, he may experience a meeting with a prostitute as utilitarian to such a degree that it decreases his sensory pleasure to an unsatisfactory level (Collins 2014: 229). Therefore, the crucial issue is for the female worker to direct the interaction with a client in such a manner that he does not feel the *artificial character* of the meeting and gets the impression that the relationship *is authentic*. From this perspective, for a female worker, an advantageous result of negotiating the scope of services, price and duration of the meeting with the client posed the greatest challenge in terms of the interaction. However, the level of profit generated is mainly influenced by the manner in which they are negotiated and then performed the sexual activities. These were the activities that exerted the greatest influence on the level of client satisfaction from the meeting, thus, also on their readiness to generously compensate a female worker for her personalized attention (Prus, Irini 1988: 25).

As suggested by research results, numerous clients expect the female workers to show some emotional involvement in the interaction (Castle, Lee 2008; Bernstein 2007; Holt, Blevins 2007; Sanders 2008; Milrod, Weitzer 2012: 449). Paradoxically, clients who search for sex without commitment in escort agencies expect something more than just the mechanical fulfillment of sexual needs after visiting a venue. They also want to experience the closeness and the feeling of an emotional bond, intimacy, even if they are aware that it is just be an illusion to a great extent (Milrod, Weitzer 2012: 453). In the literature of the subject, this result is called “The Girlfriend Experience” (GFE). This means that sex workers imitate activities that are typical for non-commercial emotional relationships. Therefore, during a meeting, the client may feel as if he is experiencing something with a girl that is looking for contact with him because of who he is, and not because of the money that he is paying her (Weitzer 2005: 224). A client should have the impression that there is some “chemistry,” some “spark” between him and the female worker, a bond has been established and that the meeting is satisfactory in emotional and sexual terms, for the partner as well (Sanders 2008). Therefore, the service offered to the client is sexual intercourse, but inevitable elements are the company and intimacy included in the price (Milrod, Weitzer 2012: 449). Therefore, the GFE can be considered one of the precious services for a client who expects at least a semblance of emotional involvement and feeling (Milrod, Weitzer 2012 450).

Numerous women in the researched agencies undertook *work on the relationship with the client*, based on spontaneously or strategically giving the impression that there is an authentic and close relationship. A basic way to achieve it was to *personalize the relationship*, by triggering an impression that the client can count on individual and unique treatment, without any judgment. At the same time, the female worker is full of involvement and understanding of his needs, behaviors,

and anxieties, etc. Of course, it necessitates employing different measures for particular clients:

Each client is approached individually. Each client has a different character. You need to feel him. When you get into his mind, you can deal with him without any problems. [R35]

The first moments when the meeting atmosphere is developed, and the negotiations regarding the types of services and their prices are performed, are most important for the effectiveness of the *work on the relationship*. Client satisfaction increases if elements typical of prostitution are modified and restrained during the interaction. This means, among others, minimizing the bargaining for payment. Instead, the female worker tries to give the impression that the meeting is pleasant for her, and that she is actually sexually excited (Collins 2014: 229–230). This requires that she use some delicate *techniques to get the client to open up* (e.g. presenting financial issues and offering a range of services in a way that provides an atmosphere of fun or jokes; there is a focus on the client's expectations, which is intended to guarantee that the time spent in the agency will be special):

There was this one guy yesterday, and he didn't know why he came here. Fine. So, we'll get to it in a minute. So, I started to play doctor, and I examined the guy and felt that he simply wanted a woman in his bed, not to MAKE LOVE, he just wanted to feel close to a WOMAN, so he must have missed this closeness or something. And he didn't want to satisfy her physico-physiologically or satisfy himself, he just wanted this closeness, he wanted to be with somebody, this hour, something different. Maybe he found his life BORING, the same all the time, so he came here. [R42]

Similarly, the pace and form of the activities at further stages of the interactions should be adapted to the patterns of non-commercial erotic relations. This means that an obligatory element of a meeting is (sometimes very elaborate) foreplay, which slowly transforms (or not) into sexual intercourse:

You need to approach this man with warmth. Because there are girls that get right to the point [with reluctance – note by I.Š.]. And I say to myself, you need to pet them, hug them a little, not get straight to the point, right? [...] You need to pet him, touch him, hug, slowly. Because you know, everyone's different. You really need to act a little, so the clients will come back. [R9]

Some of them, if they come here, they're more afraid than we are. I've spoken to a lot of clients. For example, I say [calmly], "Don't stress, I won't hurt you [laughter], nothing bad happens here [laughter], a relaxing massage for now, and when you're relaxed we can start having fun." They really are more stressed about the place they are going. It's like someone invited you to a party but you DON'T KNOW those people. And you go. Aren't you afraid? You are. [R38]

Within the scope of *personalizing relations*, the female workers give the impression that a meeting with a given client is special and unique. Therefore, they try to hide the routine elements of the interaction, introducing things that are intended to be interpreted as spontaneous (Goffman 2000: 78). For example, when talking to clients, the women often said, “I’m saying this only to you...”; “It’s the first time I’ve felt so good with a client.” They present positive emotions towards him, and thus encourage him to carry on with the interaction. They also play authentic interest, trying to get to know the client, learn more about his life and motives for the visit in the venue. Such conversations help to relax the atmosphere and establish a bond with the stranger which may facilitate the woman when performing sexual intercourse (apart from the additional advantage it provides in that it takes up time):

I try to talk to them. “Where are you from?” Something like that. “What do you do?” And I start a conversation, some humor, and the atmosphere is relaxed, and it’s completely different, you approach it differently. [R40]

If a female worker is capable of memorizing the information that the client shared with her (e.g. his name) and refers to it during the next meeting, it reassures him that he actually was important to her, and the acquaintance is worth continuing. *Personalizing the relations* helps to win the client’s affection as it increases his self-esteem (Doliński 2000: 85):

I’m really good with faces. I somehow remember everything, like whether he spoke about this or that, and I make it a whole, and I will remember it for the second meeting. I have a client that told me on the first day that he had bought a car. And I have been asking him, and he comes quite regularly, what the car is like. I know he has a grandchild, so I always ask about the grandchild, anything. There’s always something we can talk about together. You also need to approach them properly. [...] But they also sometimes show some understanding. For example, “Tell me, are you tired?” I’m not saying that everyone is like that, but there are some. [R36]

The feeling of closeness and intimacy between a female worker and a client is strengthened and maintained by using diminutives, pet names, but also pretending to be fascinated or even in love with a client (cf. Konecki 2008).

An important dimension of the work *on the relationship* is to preserve the impression of the *authenticity* of the female workers’ experiences. They should be especially credible during sexual intercourse so that the client believes that the sex with him is a pleasant feeling for the female worker. The belief that sexual excitation is a shared experience between the partners seems to be an important (indispensable?) condition for a satisfactory meeting, even in the case of commercial sexual intercourse (cf. Collins 2014: 229). Thus, there is the common practice of simulating the sexual excitement and orgasm “so they think that ‘it is

as it should be” [R41]. These activities are an element of professional knowledge held by the female workers, necessary to carry out the work appropriately, as they intensify the client’s pleasure (Collins 2014: 229–230), thus, facilitating the interaction. Simulating sexual excitement and an orgasm requires a certain amount of acting (Prus, Irini 1988). Therefore, the female workers who described their duties adopted dramaturgical analogies during all interviews and numerous conversations, comparing the work in the agency to the theater and acting:

I laugh that it’s like being an actress. And it’s actually like that. You need to wear nice clothes, make-up, you should act in a certain way, and you just act, all the time. It’s the same in bed; you pretend that you feel so good, he stops and you still moan, automatically [laughter]. [R9]

I try to show that I’ve already had, like, four orgasms if the client cannot cum, for example. I moan, I simply help to satisfy him even QUICKER. But I don’t care. [...] I HAVEN’T HAD an orgasm with a client for several years. But I pretend I DID, “Yes, of course honey, aaaah” [she demonstrates how she pretends]. I moan on request, but it’s just pretending. [R50]

The experience of *authentic relations* must last to the end of the meeting, and it must be present in all of its elements. Therefore, the client experiences the interaction as if it was *authentic*, in contrast to the *artificial one*, when the female worker does not undertake *work on the relationship* or she does it incompetently:

I try to be normal, not like, you know, I look back at the TV; but I give something from myself. I can pet him, without an extra charge. I can kiss him. After it’s finished I don’t stand up, we don’t get dressed, but you know I just lay down, hugging him, and you know. Even for a minute, but it’s important, right. That it’s not so artificial, and like, “You paid so do your business quickly and get the fuck out.” It’s like, not too nice. I wouldn’t like to feel that way if I was in his shoes. I surely wouldn’t like to. [R40]

Work on the relationship can be interpreted as a combination of sex work and emotional labor (Hochschild 2009). Some “processing” is employed in the case of the emotions of both the client (so he feels special) and the female worker who – regardless of how she sees him – must activate particular feelings, enthusiasm, and openness (cf. Weitzer 2005: 217; Sanders 2005b: 328; Hochschild 2009). Although this may be achieved through superficial actions (Hochschild 2009: 41) the *work on the relationship* is most effective if it is a deep action, and the female worker’s emotions seem to be sincere and spontaneous⁵ (Hochschild 2009: 42). It should be stressed that, in order to develop this kind of contact, there is also a need

⁵ It is similar in the case of strippers, cf. Pasko (2002: 55).

for cooperation from the client's side. Creating the feeling of *an authentic meeting* is common interaction work, and both parties may potentially destroy it (e.g. if a client behaves aggressively, the female worker can pointedly demonstrate the *non-authenticity* of the meeting, which is a form of a punishment for his behavior; cf. Chapter 6). The *client's work* usually means showing his interest in the female worker's feelings and her comfort during the interaction. A client who adopts such a strategy may be sure that the female worker will make an effort to *work on the relationship* even if she only follows the mutuality principle.

Elizabeth Bernstein, while considering the relations between women who provide sex services and their clients, developed a concept of bounded authenticity. She describes some emotional and physical bonds that emerge between partners as authentic but limited by the time frame of the meeting, and the fact that they are acquired (purchased) (Bernstein 2007: 103). My research (carried out among a group of female workers who come from the lower classes) shows that the level of *authenticity* of relations can be differentiated: from the effective development of *bounded authenticity* (e.g. in the case of permanent clients), to abandonment or a highly ineffective simulation of *authenticity* by the female workers. The clients may also defeat the activities undertaken in this respect. Therefore, we cannot talk about the "limited" emotional and physical authenticity between partners in each interaction. Among the interviewees, *work on the relationship with a client* was carried out usually by the slightly older women. For them, it was a way to achieve a competitive advantage and win some clients who expected such behavior. For clients who are looking for the GFE, the ability of the female workers to express emotions is equally or more important than their physical features (Bernstein 2007: 126; Milrod, Monto 2012). This work was also undertaken by women who carried out the *selective choice of clients* and having a lower number of meetings *in the room*. Therefore, they were less tired and burnt out.⁶ In turn, the younger and more attractive female workers, who had numerous meetings with clients, had lower motivation to undertake such type of work. Among many reasons, it was related to the fact that, regardless of how they referred to the clients, they usually had a sufficient number of "hours" to get satisfactory profits. The level of involvement in the *work on the relationship* was also influenced by the behavior of a given client, the previous experiences of the female worker with this and other clients, and the fact that the partners were under influence of psychoactive substances (cf. Chapter 6).

If a female worker does not want to or is incapable of undertaking *work on the relationship*, she can, for example, *abandon* it or even do things "to tease" a client (which can be treated in this context as an element of an "act of dignity," cf. Gorzko 2005). The clients are particularly hurt by over-the-top demonstrations of the *non-authenticity* of the presented emotions by the sex workers, or the almost

⁶ For example, I. Vanwesenbeeck (2005) wrote about professional burnout among sex workers.

complete lack of emotion. The clients perceive this type of behavior as objectifying (Milrod, Weitzer 2012: 454; cf. Prus, Irini 1988):

If there is, for example, a client who pisses me off, and he comes here, doesn't give me a tip but still wants to strain me for the whole hour, then I DON'T PRETEND. The opposite. Then I show that he has PISSED ME OFF. And I'm like, "Can you cum already?" I don't know, "Look at my face, you think it doesn't hurt," or something like that. And if a client is nice, he gives me a tip, and I know the he'll cum relatively quickly, then I pretend to help him. [R6]

The lower the chances that a man will become a "good" regular client, the greater the probability that the undertaken *work on the relationship* will be *abandoned*, if he violates the interaction standards related to the meeting *in the room*:

If he's a regular client who comes to the agency, he's treated differently. And if it's someone here for the first time, or he comes here very rarely, etc., and he's unpleasant or even a bit heavy-handed, etc., we also treat him differently. I don't need to be very nice and pretend here. [R5]

5.2. FEELING THE CLIENT

The success of the meeting *in the room* depends to a great extent on whether a female worker can adjust how she acts to the client's expectations, even if he doesn't express them straightforwardly. The key is her ability to appropriately select negotiation techniques regarding the scope of work, type of relations, time, and price for the meeting so that it is realized according to the *scenario* that satisfies a given man, but at the same time is as advantageous for a female worker as possible. In other words, during an interaction with a client, the female workers should quickly identify what he would want to experience *in the room*, and what they should do with him. The interviewees called this process *feeling the client*, i.e., 'reading' his expectations of how to play the role of an agency worker. Hence, along with negotiating the sex worker's role, at the same time she is negotiating the corresponding role of the client.

The feeling can begin even at the stage of *strategic seduction*, and then it is carried on for the whole time the man is present in the venue. The success of the interaction *in the room* depends to a great extent on the level at which this skill is embraced. However, this is a difficult task, especially if we consider the variety of fantasies and needs of the clients, as well as the short time that the female worker can use to reconstruct what they expect from the meeting. As not all women can carry out the interaction in such a manner, the interviewees perceived *feeling the client* as a natural skill that one has or does not:

There are different people here, and you need to get along with all of them. And if you have SOMETHING, a GIFT, it's like you've won the lottery if you can approach a client, anyone, approach them psychologically. It doesn't matter what kind of client it is. (...) You need to know how to approach a given man, this way, that way, and differently. To pacify him, to win him over. So, it's like I want it to be. And so, the client is satisfied. [R47]

However, it seems that *feeling the clients* can be learned through the cumulative experiences of interacting with them. This process usually involves observing a given man and responding to his significant gestures (Mead 1934) in a way that allows the female worker to prevent or inhibit any emerging problems in the interaction. The female worker's first intuitive ideas regarding the client's fantasies and needs are verified when she starts to interact with him. Afterward, if there is such a need, they are modified and corrected. Therefore, the course of a meeting with a client is influenced by each party's appraisal of the other and what they do based on those assessments. While they are *in the room*, the female workers and clients continuously adjust to each other, negotiating and renegotiating what they do:

It depends on the girl and the client. Each client is different and should be approached differently. You observe the client, what he's doing. Some clients like hugging, because they lack this warmth of a woman. And others just want to have sex. They do what they need to and they leave. It's really different. [R9]

Through role-making (Turner 1962) and acting according to the clients' expectations, the female workers play some interaction games with them, where a few commonalities can be found. An analysis of the collected empirical data makes it possible to distinguish four *scenarios* according to which the interactions with clients were performed in the researched venues.

5.3. SCENARIOS OF RELATIONS WITH THE CLIENT IN THE ROOM

The category of *scenarios of relations with the client in the room* refers to a general organization of the meeting, from welcoming to sending off, with special consideration given to determining what exactly the sex worker will do with the client, negotiating the rate, managing the meeting time or undertaking *work on the relationship* or not. The scenarios can be ordered on a continuum from *romance*, through *erotic adventure*, *sexual services* to *mechanical sex*. Which of these will be carried out (and whether it changes during the interaction) comes from *feeling the client* and continuously adapting to his behavior, words and reconstructed needs.

5.3.1. Romance

A *romance scenario* takes place in interactions with *regular clients* who visit a given female worker regularly for a longer time. In such types of relationships, the mutual knowledge about the partners is more in-depth than in the case of standard interactions in the agency, but the mutual requirements are also higher. From the perspective of the female worker, the *romance scenario* requires continuous maintenance of the client's involvement, demonstrating an interest in his issues and performing *work on the relationship*. The *parapsychological work* usually dominates during the meeting, often at the cost of the *sexual work*. The female workers usually do not risk employing techniques that *shorten the meeting*; on the contrary, it is *extended* as much as possible, so to demonstrate the desire to stay with the client for as long as they can. From the observer's perspective, the most visible distinguishing features of this type of relationships were the very warm welcomes and send-offs full of grief. They were an expression of longing that the female worker experienced. In the majority of cases, the *regular client* really did trigger some affection in the interviewees; however, the welcomes and send-offs were of a strategic character, developing the man's attachment and making it more difficult for him to change the female worker for another one. For a few clients, these actions resulted in them becoming highly involved in the relationship with the female worker:

There are clients with high earnings, and there are also those who don't earn much, but their visits to the agency have already got them hooked. Because they somehow become addicted to the girls. I don't know, there's something like a few clients become really attached to particular girls. They come to the agency like once or twice a week. So, there's a certain attachment, in some cases. A kind of addiction to coming here. [R4]

In an ideal situation, a female worker is so effective in making the client attached that he stays *faithful* to her, at least for some time (but maybe only within the area of a given venue, as it cannot be disregarded that a client might also meet other women outside this venue):

There are these girls who have their regular clients here, like M. for example. She's been working here for a long time, so she has a lot of people coming to her, and only to her. And it's so intense that the girls say that if she's not at work, for example, then the guys leave, they don't want other girls. [R28]

However, in the case of a relationship with a client, it can be never stated that it is "forever." The term *regular client* really means a client who prefers meetings with a certain female worker. Each relationship of this sort ends at a given mo-

ment – when the man stops coming to the venue or changes his preferences as regards the female worker (which is especially painful and causes envy, rivalry and *hostile actions*). To ensure stability of earnings, the women need to get involved in getting new clients, and *take them over* from other female workers continuously:

Those older girls who are have been on the market longer, they have their own clients. But it also fades with time, because it's like, a man has the money now so he goes to the agency, but it might be different later, because if a man doesn't have the money, right? Something could happen to him at any moment. So, you can't say he's a regular client, that he'll always be. It's not like that. You develop new clients every now and then, and then they come to the same girl all the time, because they liked it, it was nice, pleasant. But there are also those clients that won't go to the same girls, they just won't, and that's it. It doesn't matter if it was good or not, whether it suited him or not. They need to have a new girl. [R38]

Therefore, not all actions intended to get a *regular client* bring the expected result. On the other hand, the changeability of clients' tastes and preferences allows one to presume that even if a female worker has no permanent relationship at a given moment, she can change that at any time. Therefore, the cycle of interactions with such a client is performed according to the following scheme: getting a *regular client* – maintaining the client – losing him and/or having him taken over by another female coworker – getting/taking over a client who becomes a *regular client*.

The above-mentioned activities require a certain level of involvement when dealing with *regular clients*. This is a kind of investment that compensates the female worker thanks to the significant benefits that are connected with this relationship. It is based on the “logics of favors” (Gorzko 2005: 17), the mutual exchange of certain “gifts,” material or not. For example, in the context of negotiating the scope of services, *regular clients* more often comply with the female workers' suggestions related to sex positions, and they are even ready to undertake activities calculated only to provide her with sexual pleasure (Weitzer 2005: 217). The female worker also obtains additional gratification in the financial dimension (e.g. gifts):

There are a lot of regular clients here. This client has our phone number, and he calls beforehand and asks about one girl, whether she's free, he then comes to her at a specific time, and if she's occupied he leaves. And they say they get used to them. If they come for the first time with a girl, and they like her a lot, they get used to her, and they come again, treat her like a second wife. This is what they say, literally. And they even sometimes can give you a golden watch, ring, flowers, earrings, sometimes VERY high amounts of money. It happens. There are not a lot of them, by they happen. I also have this man who is very rich and gives me very expensive gifts. And it's like FOR NOTHING, because he literally doesn't want anything. He just doesn't have, as he puts it, he doesn't have anyone he could give them to, and he's got so much money that he doesn't know what to do with it, so he brings it to me. There are such guys. Quite a small percentage, but still. [R1]

An advantage of having a *regular client* is also his predictability. A female worker knows how he behaves *in the room*, what *sexual activities* he prefers and how he responds to alcohol. Therefore, a meeting with such a client is a time for mental relaxation, as it does not require the female worker to stay alert or carry out continuous negotiations as in the case of new clients:

You have some common topics to talk about, you know him, as a friend. And if there's a new guy, you need to talk with him from the beginning. And in this case, it's already clear how it was with this client, he's said something about his life, his problems; I did as well. It's a little different then. Better. [R46]

There are these relationships like, "Oh, it's nice seeing you." Actually, you see a guy, and it may sound weird, but you're happy that it's him, because he's all right, because this hour with him will be fun; you won't get too tired, it'll be good. [R16]

However, it should be stressed that a longer, mutually satisfying relationship may turn into an *authentic* emotional relationship for one or both sides. As a result of undertaken actions (*work on the relationship*) they can also easily believe that the feelings are mutual (cf. Milrod, Weitzer 2012: 450). In an extreme situation, this may lead to one or both partners of this relationship falling in love (Milrod, Weitzer 2012: 454). A *relationship* with the client is often the only close relationship in the female worker's life which, in turn, makes her liable to be abused and hurt (e.g. if a client cynically exploits the female worker's involvement to provide himself with free sexual intercourse). In some situations, this intimacy of relationships with the *regular client* is so high that a female worker leaves both the venue and sex work.

Having a *regular client* also introduces the element of predictability into the financial dimension of work in the agency (cf. Prus, Irini 1988: 19), allowing the female workers to plan her income. She can determine it in advance when the client will visit the agency, and by knowing his customs, she can predict how much money he will spend. Even if he is not too generous, he is an assured source of income; therefore, the female worker treats him in a special way. Usually, the plan for a given day is subject to the visit of the *regular client*. As his meeting is "arranged," the female worker can book his favorite room. She also gives up the opportunity to meet other clients who arrive at the similar time and she does not go out *to the lounge*, incurring *the costs of lost opportunities*:

They call earlier and ask whether this girl is free at a given time. Or when they leave, we just arrange a meeting for them for a particular day – that he'll come about this hour, or that he'll call. And then, even if a client comes, I don't go out, because I know that my client will come at one o'clock, for example, and I know that I'll earn some money. And this is my regular client, so I'll wait so that I don't lose him. If he doesn't come, he doesn't, but I'll wait for him. [R5]

All of this means that dealing with the *regular client* requires certain “investments” from both parties. It is worth stressing that not every *regular client* is equally valuable to a female worker, which is reflected in the intensity of her efforts:

Those who have money are treated differently. Because when this regular client comes, for example to me, yesterday there was this, what’s his name? W.? W. I think. I squeezed fifty zlotys out of him [bitter laughter], he never gave me that, but I squeezed it out of him. And what? It’s like chop-chop with him, and, “Goodbye, baby. Bye, see you later. [sweet voice] And when are you coming? In a week? Two? In a week. Get lost!” [with reluctance]! [R3]

When categorizing the clients *in the lounge* and during the negotiations *in the room*, the women especially desire a client who is generous, not too demanding, and kind.

5.3.2. Erotic adventure

The *erotic adventure* scenario was usually treated by the interviewees as an introduction and invitation to develop the *romance* scenario. For it to be carried out successfully, the female workers must perform some emotional labor (Hochschild 2009) and undertake *work on the relationship*. Therefore, it is typical to strategically simulate closeness, involvement, care, and an individual approach to the client who should be made to feel like someone special. Therefore, the female worker’s attempts to build her role from elements that are borrowed from non-commercial erotic relations, which distance her from the stereotypical role of a “prostitute”. These actions are based on the belief that a client who visits the agency desires not only to have his sexual needs fulfilled, but also to feel the closeness and acceptance of another human. It is also important for the client to get away from his gray, everyday life, to experience something different, an “adventure” while dealing with interesting women, ready to bring his fantasies to life. Hence, these relations are of an erotic, not only sexual nature. From the female worker’s perspective, this scenario allows her to increase her earnings while at the same time limiting the work with/on a client’s body to the benefit of the *parapsychological work*, *work on the relationship* and the *accompanying sexual activities*, so the client feels attractive and desired (in the sexual but also in the social dimension).

There are two sub-scenarios that can be differentiated within the *erotic adventure scenario*. The first one is the *sub-scenario of fun*. In this case, it is typical to extend the time spent *in the lounge* in a broader group of female workers, to take psychoactive substances and have fun together, and to carry out some *quasi-sexual activities*:

Do you know what the best thing to do in our job is? To do nothing but still earn money. So, the best client is, like, he comes and, you know, he takes the girls to the room, and he wants to drink with them and have fun. He most often takes like two or three girls and wants to have fun. [R20]

The second sub-scenario involves directing the interaction with a client in such a way that allows the women to create the atmosphere of a date, but in the context of an agency. *The date* can adopt a more or less erotic form, but it usually also includes some elements of *parapsychological work*. It can be related to staying longer *in the lounge* and extending the stage of *strategic seduction*. It does not mean that there is no sexual intimacy during such meetings; however, it is usually embedded in many *accompanying sexual activities*. This scenario is usually carried out by those women who meet with fewer clients. In such a situation, *the value* of each client increases and the female worker attaches more attention to each element of the interaction.

As suggested by observations and interviews, acting out *the erotic adventure scenario* can be satisfying for the female workers. Carrying out an interaction effectively makes the client feel more confident and often ready to treat a given woman in a kind manner which in turn exerts a positive influence on her self-esteem, encouraging to greater involvement in the relation:

I think that it's like, when a guy is fulfilled, and you know, the one that was going out kissed me, thanked. And then you know that he simply had a nice time. [R40]

5.3.3. Sexual service

Although many clients would like the meeting in the agency to resemble a non-commercial relationship to the maximum extent, there are also many men who expect it only to fulfill their need for sexual diversity and change (Sanders 2008). Therefore, *the sexual service scenario* attaches the greatest significance to *sexual work on the client's body*, while the *parapsychological work* is limited or does not exist at all. The meetings performed in that manner are usually *shortened* or *not extended* beyond the hour. During the meetings, both parties focus on fulfilling their needs: the client on his sexual needs, and the female worker on her financial needs. Hence, relationships of a more personal nature between the partners are established less often. It is frequently the case that the female worker is assigned the role of a *sex expert*, whose job is to solve the man's sex problems against for a fee:

They come here with different problems, for example with their penises. They think that if they come here we can work a miracle, that we're like some erotic emergency service. [R42]

Structuring the meetings in this manner results in one partner objectifying the other. Incidents of aggression are rare in the *sex service scenario*, and the relationships are often neutral, determined only by the logics of profit and loss. In the client's eyes, paying for the meeting transforms this interaction into a transaction. It equates the sexual services with any other type of service, where the worker's involvement and the quality of the interaction may be evaluated. As a result, some unsatisfied clients who shared this perspective felt entitled to submit *complaints* (as they would do in the case of other services) if their sexual expectations were not fulfilled. They believe that a boss who has been informed about the claim should provide a refund or force the female worker to perform a given type of service:

I had these kinds of clients myself, they happened to me. They had had a lot of fun during the day, and were now unfortunately incapable of having sex. And they had a few requirements, because I'm here to do it one way and not another way. So, I agree to that, but it sometimes doesn't work out. And there are those who understand it, and there are those who go to the boss to complain. [R5]

On the other hand, such behavior from clients is often the final justification for the female workers squeezing the clients for money or *abandoning their work on the relationship*:

I once asked a client, and he told me this: "Listen, it's like I went to the dentist to have my tooth extracted or filled, so I come, do my business, and I leave." So, I said, "Right, of course." [ironically]. If his approach is like this, why should ours be better? It's nice when you can have fun, when he pays, you always get some money out of him for drinks, a juice, or Red Bull, because we get money from everything; we take him to the room immediately to earn a little. [R32]

5.3.4. Mechanical sex

The *Mechanical sex scenario* seems to be more typical for the street form of prostitution; however, it was also adopted in the researched escort agencies. In the case of clients who visited the venue to execute this script, the meeting with a female worker was related only to their unloading some sexual tension. Sexual intercourse was usually in the form of "a quickie" or performing some *non-standard services*. In numerous cases, there was a bare minimum of foreplay or there was none at all. The interactions were described by the female workers as mechanical, especially since the meetings were usually deprived of *parapsychological work* and *work on the relationship* – not because the female worker did not want to do it, but because the client did not accept such actions. The sexual experiences of the client had the greatest bearing on the meetings; he expected only skillful service and the fulfillment of his needs:

Some guys come here just to fuck someone, mechanically. They don't even care if they use the whole time they paid for, this hour or thirty minutes. They do what they needs to and leave. (...). He comes, fucks, leaves, and that's that. [R40]

15 minutes is often enough for them during the day. Chop-chop, it's over, and back to work. The tension unloaded. [R43]

They were humiliating experiences for many female workers. As they saw it, it made them similar to sex dolls, especially since the men looking for such experiences often preferred hardcore sex or were inclined towards verbal or physical aggression. The women who had such meetings dealt with them by developing defense mechanisms, related to dissociation (Sztobryn-Giercuszkiwicz 2004: 121; Ślęzak 2018b: 32):

It's MECHANICAL work. You spread your legs, you want it to start, you look at the ceiling and that's it. A production line. There's absolutely no pleasure. [R3]

5.3.5. Scenarios of relations with the client in the room – final remarks

From the perspective of the success of the interaction *in the room*, the key is to match the client with the female worker regarding the expected and performed *meeting scenarios*. Their coherence contributes to the harmonious performance of the service and the satisfaction of both parties. Although it cannot be stated that female workers adopted the same *scenario* during all meetings, there were some noticeable regularities. The *erotic adventure and romance scenario* was usually adopted by those interviewees who had fewer clients, both in their career and on a given day or week. There were also women who were relatively older and less attractive physically than the women who perform *sexual service* or *mechanical sex scenario*. In turn, the female workers with symptoms of burnout syndrome were often inclined towards performing a *sexual service* or *mechanical sex scenario*, which did not require them to carry out any *work on the relationship*. It should be noticed that there is an arena of concern among the female workers (Clarke 1991; Strauss 1984: 133–134; Kacperczyk 2005: 176; Konecki 2005: 82) regarding which *scenario* should be adopted to play the role appropriately, i.e., who you *are* when you adopt a specific *scenario*. An ignition point seems to be the definition of *work with/on the client's body*, *work on emotions* and *work on the relationship*. Proponents of the *sexual service scenario* treat this kind of work as a resource that cannot be wasted by giving it away for free. Therefore, all activities undertaken with a client should be evaluated and paid for (as they can be offered for free only to people close to them, outside the commercial context). They

also believe that since they are treated objectively by the clients in the agency, they should treat them the same way. In turn, the female workers who perform the *romance* or *erotic adventure scenarios* are of the opinion that the perspective of their opponents “over-economizes” the interaction and means *selling themselves*. From their perspective, you need to give something more of yourself while working with a client, i.e., your involvement, even if feigned, so the client feels well and believes that he has spent his money well:

This depends on the culture, how they were raised, and where they come from. Because some girls are like a client is a sleaze. No, you can't have this attitude. You know, the client comes and pays for the sex, for this and that, even for this stupid smile, or just for you to be there or to go to the room. But he's still a human being, a person. You need to serve him the best you can so he's got the best opinion about us. [R47]

Both parties in the dispute usually have a negative approach to each other, which is reflected in other conflicts in the group of female coworkers (cf. Chapter 3).

5.4. SUMMARY

A meeting with a client *in the room* is a complex interaction game, where the female worker's role significantly exceeds passively performing the sexual services expected by the client. It is characterized by active negotiations of the range of performed services and their prices, as well as the amount of time spent with the client. From the perspective of the female workers, the meeting should allow them to maximize the profits and minimize their outlays (so the interactions are as physically, mentally and emotionally undemanding as possible, cf. Collins 2014: 228; Bryan 1965: 291), even if this requires certain transgressions, e.g., of a moral nature. This set of requirements should be expanded by one further condition – the maximum acceptable level of self-safety (cf. Chapter 6). The most advantageous interactions are those that allow a female worker to fulfill all of those objectives. However, if it is impossible, she will aim for a situation where the profit is high enough in at least one of the dimensions that it compensates for the loss in another (e.g. although a client was unpleasant, he left a high tip; although the female worker did not manage to earn a lot from the meeting, the client was not tiring). Working effectively with the client involves choosing the most effective strategy to maximize the profits and minimize the effort, at the same time preserving a given level of safety; and all of this must be done in the existing conditions. Therefore, the female workers try to control the meeting; this is possible because they are often the more experienced party (Prus, Irini 1988: 24). However, the interaction must be played out in such a manner that the client does not feel like he is be-

ing directed, and he will go along with what happens naturally. If an experienced female worker and a *regular* meet during the interaction, it takes on the form of a game, where one side wants to earn as much money as possible for as little work as possible, while the other wants to get as much as possible for as little money as possible. There are games with impressions, expectations and complexes of both parties so that they can achieve their objectives, but there are also mutual concessions made for their own benefit (Prus, Irini 1988: 24).

It is worth stressing that over the course of the interaction, the female worker's level of involvement, and whether or not she *works on the relationship*, is connected with her emotional labor (Hochschild 2009). It is of crucial importance for the client to get some satisfaction from the interaction. Despite the common belief that men pay for sex to avoid any emotional obligations or the need to invest their time in a romantic relationship, the research proves that some clients seek intimacy and warmth, and they additionally compensate the female workers for this experience (Bernstein 2007; Sanders 2008; Milrod, Weitzer 2012: 464). In particular, those who become *regular clients* do not expect one-sided and purely physical satisfaction; they also want an emotional bond with the person they are interacting with (Milrod, Weitzer 2012: 464). At the same time, achieving such a relationship requires involvement and work, not only from the female worker but also the client.

In this chapter, I focused on those interactions where the female worker and the client reach an understanding related to the course of the meeting. In the next chapter, I will concentrate on those interactions where one party refuses to accept the subjectivity of the other and attempts to dominate the meeting by imposing their perspective and definition of the situation.

Chapter 6

SECURITY AND SAFETY WORK¹

The actions undertaken by female workers presented in the previous chapters allow them to direct the interaction in such a way that it is carried out relatively smoothly, although not without a risk (especially in the *mechanical sex scenario*). Therefore, the female workers strive to adjust the working conditions with the client to their possibilities and expectations. They also attempt to subjectify the relationship, so it offers them some space to refuse a meeting or to express an objection towards performing a given kind of service.

It is important that the clients are familiarized with a set of interaction principles that allow the women to carry out a meeting in a manner that is satisfying for both partners (although not necessarily in the same dimensions). This requires the clients to remain ready to undertake the process of negotiation with the female workers and treat them subjectively. In the previous chapter, while presenting the *scenarios* of the meeting, I demonstrated a way both parties may reach an agreement regarding the course of an interaction. Here, I will concentrate on a situation where the negotiated order of the meeting is disturbed by the clients. I grasped the issues of work safety in a broad perspective, discussing not only cases of clients' aggressive behaviors, but also their actions that threaten the female workers' self-esteem and objectify them. When a female worker accepts such an incident, it is often the first step that leads to passive submission and to other forms of aggression as well.

Before I present the interactions in the sex worker-client dyad, I will demonstrate their broader context, i.e., the actions undertaken by the venue's manager and the other workers. They are intended to increase the work safety in the agency.

6.1. AGENCY MANAGERS AND THE MATTER OF SAFETY

The agency's managers may influence the work safety in numerous ways. It is crucial how they themselves approach the female workers (cf. Chapter 2) and whether they introduce and carry out principles regarding client behavior within the venue.

¹ Some notions included in this chapter were raised in the article Ślęzak (2017).

Repeated fights, rows, and attacks on the female workers are reflected in the *venue's reputation*, both among the clients and the (current and potential) sex workers. Therefore, *the bosses* who adopt *the professional management style* invest in systems of client control, treating them as indispensable operational costs. Security guards are usually the basis for such systems. There were several variants of hiring them encountered in the venues. Smaller agencies employ amateur workers who “have the look” (they are young and strapping, they appear to be fit and muscular, and they might also be related to the criminal underworld) or who have experience in working in similar places (in this case, it might include older men, without the “characteristic” appearance). The younger guards, just by their appearance, have a calming influence on the female workers and a disciplining impact on the clients. However, the more experienced the older workers are, the better they are at predicting the clients’ behavior; thus, they can play their role more effectively. It is especially important when cooperating with an external security company that might arrive at the venue in a matter of minutes, if there is such a need. Therefore, the *resident* guards do not need to be in peak physical condition. As suggested by the interviewees, the older workers get involved in romances with female workers less often, which is important for preserving the order in the venue. In this employment variant of security guards (regardless of their age), they are present in the agency for the whole time. It is often the case that the scope of their duties is extended with some additional roles (e.g. in the bar, entering the records of payments).

An alternative solution is to employ professional workers who are licensed as physical security guards, equipped with means of direct coercion. *Resident* security was not employed in such situations; rather, there were intervention groups that would come to the agency after an alarm was activated. There were also electronic security systems mounted in the venues: alarm systems (alarm buttons and monitoring devices) in selected places in the premises (e.g. near beds, in each meeting room) and closed-circuit cameras (at the entrance to the venue, in generally-accessible places, e.g. *in the lounge*). This “monitoring system” was also utilized by the female workers for the purpose of preserving security in a broader sense. They used it to check whether there are no people they know among the clients going *into the lounge* who are not aware that they provide sexual services, and thus they should not see them in an escort agency:

We have this video camera, so we look to see who goes in downstairs, because you know, there may always be someone familiar, so if there are other girls, you don’t need to go out to this client. Because you know, not everyone in the family knows that a wife has something to do with such a place. [R15]

From the interviewees’ perspective, the type of security adopted in the venue is of great importance. When it is based on intervention groups, it is of a more impersonal character. Its effectiveness depends mostly on the suitability of the

security systems operation, the fast response and professionalism of a given company's workers. The female workers evaluated this solution inconsistently. On the one hand, if the alarm buttons are distributed throughout the venue correctly, the women felt safer. As they said, in the case of traditional security, a scream can be interpreted wrongly or dampened by the noise in the agency. However, certain doubts were raised when it comes to the possibility to call the group, crucial for the intervention to be effective:

The girls are on their own. There's nobody else. [...] they just have the alarm. They come in three minutes, but if someone comes in with a gun, he can kill all of them. It could happen. [R34]

According to numerous interviewees, a greater feeling of safety is provided by the *resident* security, present in the agency all the time, and also visible to the clients who visit the venue. In such cases, the security guards play a preventive role just with their presence, bringing the men who behave aggressively into line. In the same venues where the security is perceived by clients as being effective, the workers have a stronger negotiating position during interactions *in the room*:

You feel better when you have security at your back. You know that if something goes wrong, you can go to him, he'll go to the room and say, "Do it this way or that way" and ok, the matter's closed. And the client won't give cheek anymore, because he knows that he'll be thrown out. So, they know here that we've got security, and you know, high-class, as you say. [R35]

It sometimes happens that if your nerves are shot, you can scare them. When nothing else works, I say, "Listen, calm down, there are cameras here, and they will come and take you away if you keep being aggressive." And it usually works. I don't know if these security guys are strong or not, but no one would like to find out. Just seeing them scares the clients. [R33]

In the case of agencies where *the boss* finds matters of security to be important, apart from making a decision on the form of security, he also limits the scope of services offered to the clients. Especially significant for the safety of female workers are so-called *trips*, i.e., the sex services that are provided outside the venue, in the client's flat or in a hotel room that he rents. Control executed by the security guards over a meeting is extremely limited in this case, which is related to numerous potential threats for the female worker. To minimize them, the woman is accompanied by a security guard during the *trips*; he takes her to the meeting place and drives her back after the service. He should also verify the client and check if he really is alone in the room. This service was temporarily and permanently withdrawn from the offer in the case of the researched agencies if *the boss* was incapable of providing the female workers with adequate security.

The manner in which the managers treat the female workers has a great impact on their feeling of security. If the workers believe that *the boss* cares about their health and life, and that in the case of danger he will be on their side, they feel safer. They also have a better position to negotiate appropriate conditions during meetings with the clients:

There was this client here, and he started saying, “You whores, fucking bitches.” And the girls were like, “What? Are you talking to us?” “Yeah.” So, we went to our room. And the boss heard it. And he said, “Sir, please leave, you won’t insult the girls here.” So, such a boss is all right! And in other places they wouldn’t pay attention to this, only MONEY matters. And here, I can’t say that. They take care of us, and they pay attention. Such a client is asked to leave. [R51]

From the perspective of the female workers, the use of security systems also proves that it is worth working in a given club, as *the boss* cares about more than just the level of profits. However, many female workers had some experience working in venues where no security systems were employed. For some *bosses*, abandoning these systems was a way to gain a competitive advantage, as a certain category of clients (fulfilling their needs related to violence or aggressive sex in an escort agency) seek such unsecured venues. Therefore, the owners’ profit is generated thanks to the fact that the female workers’ risk related to the interaction is much higher. Also, *the bosses* who adopted the *oppressive management style* stopped using security systems. *The boss* who does not respect the female workers does not care too much about protecting them from aggressive clients or other agency workers.

With their attitude and instructions given to the security guards, *the bosses* determine how complaints from clients will be dealt with. In turn, it is the readiness of the *security guards* to respond that influences how effective they will be in providing security to the sex workers in a given venue. These notions will be discussed in the next subchapter.

6.2. SECURITY GUARDS AND WORK SAFETY

The safety notions pose a broader class of phenomena for *the resident security guards* than for *the bosses* of the venues. The systemic solutions discussed in the previous subchapter focused on physical violence. However, the security guards’ area of interest also included clients’ verbal behaviors *in the lounge* and *in the room*, and all situations reported by the female workers that may turn into violent behavior on the part of the client.

Therefore, the security guards’ task is to minimize the danger of a client (especially a group of clients) provoking situations that are dangerous for the work-

ers and other guests. For that purpose, the security guards perform a *selection* of the men who want to get into the facility. It is stricter in the more popular clubs which aspire to be an exclusive place for richer men. If a venue has difficulty in attracting new clients, it usually allows everyone inside. In such a case, the risk of violence from the clients is higher.

In the researched agencies, security guards applied a multi-level system of selecting clients, evaluating them according to the following criteria:

- the risk of dangerous behavior (more or less probable), assessed on the basis of the current behavior of the client, and in the past (if he is a *regular*), but also whether the client came alone or in a group (which increases the risk of trouble);
- the status of the client in a given venue (if he is a regular client or one who is there by chance, evaluated as “good” or “bad”);
- the kind of risk (e.g. aggressive behavior, “grumbling” after alcohol).

The selection of clients is usually performed on several levels, which is strictly related to how the venue is secured. In some agencies, the security guards use a video camera that allows them to observe the behavior of potential clients who are still on the street, before they enter the venue. This allows them to eliminate men who behave aggressively (pestering passers-by, committing acts of vandalism) and who may potentially pose a threat to the agency’s workers and clients:

J. looks in the monitor to check who it is and he lets them enter or he doesn’t. They already know it, so they more or less know who they can let in and who they can’t, when a guy is aggressive, or there are two such guys, because he sees it. He sees everything as soon as the guy reached the street and got to our door, how the man is behaving. When he sees that the group is not all right, he doesn’t let them inside. They’ll just keep calling and leave. [R48]

Another barrier that allows the guards to stop a client who seems dangerous is the intercom. The direct contact with client at the agency’s door is the last possibility to *get rid of them* in a relatively trouble-free manner. If a security guard makes a wrong decision and lets a dangerous client inside, it can be much more difficult to remove him from the venue.

Selection is mostly based on observing the behavior and appearance of potential clients, as well as knowledge about their past behaviors in the facility (if they have already visited it in the past) (cf. Sanders 2004a). Clients who proved to be aggressive are remembered by the security guards and are not allowed to enter the agency. In the other cases, the decision is not simple and automatic. It is made according to the current *traffic* in the venue each and every time. It is in the agency’s interest to accept as high a number of clients as possible (taking into account the logistical possibilities of the venue), so, during *selection*, the workers continuously need to consider which is the lesser evil in a given situation: accepting an “uncertain” client or the risk that no one else will come that night; letting

in a drunk client who may cause some problems, but he is a *regular* and he may stop coming to the facility if he feels that he was treated badly; letting in a noisy group of clients who can potentially cause problems, but also provide earnings to several workers.

If the security guards decide not to allow the clients inside the venue, they need to choose the proper way of communicating this information. The purpose is not to escalate the emotions or discourage them from visiting the agency again, when they are in a better shape. An angry client may vent his frustration in front of the venue or nearby which, in turn, can cause problems with the agency's neighbors or law enforcement services. Therefore, the security guards justified their refusal on objective grounds (all the female workers are already occupied, or there is a closed event in the venue, etc.) (cf. Sanders 2005a).

The security guards adopt subsequent stages of *selection* in the case of clients who were let into the venue. They usually *monitor their behavior in the lounge* and *in the rooms*, as it can change drastically as a result of consuming alcohol in the agency or interacting with other clients. Therefore, the security guards make continuous decisions whether the behavior of a client may be deemed *acceptable* or if there is a need to react:

They were typical bodyguards, LARGER THAN LIFE. There were three of them, so if there is a situation, we are secure, because when somebody spilled some alcohol, as he was too drunk, or lost his temper, he was taken out of the premises, because they felt that there may be a danger in the room, because if he's already aggressive in the lounge, you never know how he will behave in the room. [R53]

It doesn't happen that someone insults a girl, because there's a security guy for the night and he defends that girl. She would immediately go and say that this and that guy is in the lounge and he's impolite, and he's removed right away. [R10]

Conflicts between clients are especially dangerous, particularly when they come in groups. People have different opinions, for example, related to who gets priority in choosing a given female worker. There is often a risk in such cases that the disturbance will turn into a fight, which can be impossible to control without the help of an intervention group. Such repeated episodes discourage other clients from visiting the venue. Thus, preventive measures, mediation, and calling for support or using force at the proper moment are extremely important. However, the decision on whether and how to interfere in disputes between clients is not simple. It is hard to expressly evaluate whether their state of activation and alcohol intoxication is still permissible (which makes them more susceptible to negotiations undertaken by the female workers) or it is already at the stage that it threatens the order in the venue. Despite that, the level of acceptance of risky behaviors of the clients is much higher in escort agencies than in other entertainment facilities:

There were cameras, porters, it was calm [...] Unless a real drunk came, so we asked them to leave. Or when they were really vulgar or they were too intrusive, we had this special alarm we called and the guys came and threw such blokes out. [R46]

It means that security methods are applied in the case of “really drunk”, “really vulgar” or “too intrusive” clients, which lets us notice that the mere act of becoming drunk, or the vulgar and intrusive behavior of the client, is not a cause for intervention. Only crossing a boundary, beyond which the behaviors become “really” troublesome, becomes a reason for intervention. A key matter is that the boundary should be located in a similar place, both to the security guards and the sex workers. Too restrictive reactions of the security guards may discourage the clients, who “are looking for fun”, while being too liberal would discourage women to work in a given facility.

The security guards should also be interested in how an interaction *in the room* is going. In the case of the observed venues, they *monitored* the amount of alcohol that a client drank, as well as the starting and finishing time of the meeting. If a female worker left the room during the meeting (e.g. to get more alcohol), they would ask about the client’s behavior. They also responded when a client came to them *complaining* about the female worker’s behavior. All of this information may provide the basis for an interim intervention. They also were included in the security guards’ knowledge about a given client and a given female worker, necessary for effective action in the future (e.g. to point out a client who causes trouble).

Cooperation between security guards and sex workers is crucially significant. Thanks to this cooperation, the former can obtain unique information about the clients’ behavior. In turn, the sex workers can be sure about effective intervention in case there is such a need. The women who perceive a given client as potentially dangerous, often inform the security guards about their concerns beforehand, and not only decide not to lock the door of the room where the meeting is taking place (which is standard behavior), but also leave it ajar. It allows the women to leave the room quicker in the case of a crisis, but it also increases the probability that someone will hear a scream for help and react:

You never know what might happen. It was sometimes the case that a guy choked a girl a little in the room or something, because she had locked the door and limited what steps she’d be able to take. But as I say, it depends on the girl’s psyche. I don’t lock the door. When I can’t handle it, I just scream, and the guys need to rush into the room, and it’s completely different. [R20]

In the case of a crisis, the workers decide how to *contain* it, i.e., whether to call for the external security (especially if the trouble is made by a group of clients) or act independently. They need to decide which measures will be effective in a particular case; will it be enough to intervene visually or verbally, or will it be

necessary to react sharply. Here, it needs to be emphasized that the clients may be victims of physical violence on the part of the security guards. It is, paradoxically, a mechanism analogical to that which dares the clients to behave aggressively towards the sex workers. A client that has been beaten by the security of an escort agency seldom reports this fact to the police, because he is afraid of the consequences of revealing (e.g. to close family) that he had been using such sexual services. It provides the security guards with a feeling of impunity. I don't want to say that they overuse their power in each case, but they have no scruples, and they tend to be brutal during an intervention. In turn, the female workers who describe such situations talk about it as being the right punishment for breaking the rules of the facility:

If a guy is aggressive or something, gets drunk, I can always say, "Get up, get dressed, or I'll kick you." And I saw such an incident in that club, as a guy came when he was a little drunk. Later, he picked up this heavy ashtray, and my friend and I dodged it, and the ashtray hit these mirrors. He went mad. And when the security guys came, it was no joke anymore. They took him by his hands, put him in the room they had for security guys, and they beat him there. Then the third guy let him go and off he went. You messed up so you got kicked in the ass. Simple as that. If you can't behave yourself, go to a doctor. Then we observed him on the CCTV, he went back to his car, but he came here drunk. He took a load of paper towels and stopped the bleeding somewhere in the ear, so there were tons of these towels lying around later. But he caused it, so he needed to get beaten, and it happened. He asked for it himself. [R32]

Thus, the security guards play the role of an internal protection service which, within their own circle, without involving the police, dealing with any problems connected with maintaining security in the facility. Therefore, anything that happens in the agency remains in the agency, which discreetly carries on working.

Special attention should be paid to the security guards' reactions to complaints made by the clients about sex workers. How they are solved has a great influence on the feeling of security experienced by women providing sexual services in a given venue. The complaints made by clients refer especially to rejection or a particular type of sexual service being carried out "improperly". From the security guard's perspective, acknowledging *the complaint* is the simplest solution. As it obliges the female worker to perform the service or return the money, he is not required to confront the client, as he may be required to do in other situations. Such a solution was adopted in venues of an *oppressive management style*, but also sometimes in other places if a female worker was not accepted by the coworkers (cf. *hostile actions*):

A client wanted her to jump on him for the whole hour, but she didn't want to, because she already had some sore muscles, so he complained, and the security guy must have been in a bad mood, so he told her that she needed to do everything the

client wanted, but they usually don't say that. Maybe he didn't like her or he was having a bad day. Because they usually take our side, they say that there's something wrong with the client. [R33]

It is an unwritten rule in the other management styles that the workers cooperate against the clients. It means that all workers of an agency should work together to maximize the profits and keep the risks related to the meetings as low as possible:

It was never like the boss or a security guy didn't take the side of the girls in front of a client. But the client's side. He usually always defends the girl. [R10]

From the perspective of the female workers, maintaining a good relationship with the security guards is crucial, as it is these relationships that influence both the security and the work atmosphere. Such relationships are more probable if the interactions between those categories of workers are more intensive. It happens where the "security guys" also perform other functions (e.g. a bartender or a record-keeper), which is related to frequent contact and sharing of the space. A deeper mutual understanding of each other's perspectives and *getting in sync* is possible then, and it is more difficult if security guards remain in a separated space and rarely contact the female workers. Good relations are maintained by shortening the distance and establishing a friendly attitude, and sexual relations in some cases. They are a way of *repaying* for varied support in interactions with clients, but also an investment in future relations (cf. Chapter 3). To make such relations possible, the security guards should not exalt themselves, even if they are certain about their moral superiority (which was made visible during some informal conversations, when they expressed a lack of understanding, sometimes even contempt for how the female workers earn money). All of this means that security guards who are effective and female worker-friendly, can encourage them to take up and continue the work in a given venue.

6.3. FEMALE WORKERS AND WORK SAFETY

6.3.1. Experiencing violence by sex workers in escort agencies

The provision of sex services is related to various risks for those who carry it out. While comparing different perceptions of threats by different categories of agency workers, it is the sex workers who see (and experience) most of the potentially dangerous behaviors of clients. This is supported by the structural cir-

cumstances of the *in the room* interaction. The internal status of the client remains hidden, while claims regarding the service which has been paid for are undisguised and explicit (cf. Gorzko 2005: 14). Clients that demonstrate aggressive behavior usually have the feeling of asymmetry in the relationships, believing that the power lies completely on their side. These beliefs have their roots in people's common opinions on prostitution, but also what the female workers do *in the lounge*, especially the impression they make during *the strategic seduction process*. It allows the clients to believe that they are the ones who control the course of the interaction. A separate matter is whether the female workers themselves feel and are willing to demonstrate the fact that they control the interaction, and they may count on support from other workers of the facility while enforcing it. If the interaction takes place without any problems (cf. Chapter 5), the female workers usually strive for their primacy in the interaction (Gorzko 2005: 14), a fact that goes unnoticed by the clients. However, if a client hinders or disturbs the course of the meeting, it can be revealed.

The literature on the subject suggests a common character of violence from clients towards women providing sexual services, with the emphasis that women working outdoors are more at risk (Gilchrist, Cameron, Scoular 2005: 390). However, the results from my research performed in escort agencies suggest that the risk of various kinds of trauma, both physical and emotional, also emerges in this environment.

All interviewees experienced different forms of verbal aggression while working in the agency (from epithets to threats and intimidation). Such incidents were reported during the interviews, but I also witnessed them during my observations. The clients, especially those under the influence of alcohol, used vulgar language, to refer both to sexual activities and the workers themselves. In the case of interactions *in the room*, the verbal aggression may be accompanied by physical aggression. The interviewees described many such situations that had happened to them or their female coworkers. They adopted various forms: from groping, destroying clothes, to beating, choking, forcing them to perform unwanted services, brutal sex, rape, burning body parts, and threats with a weapon.² These actions are an expression of the rejection of subjective treatment of the female workers by some clients (cf. Aronson et al. 1997: 533). The clearest example is brutal physical violence, but also often attempts to force sexual services or to not use a condom. Clients that take such actions assume that the female worker, because of how she earns money, should agree to all sexual services, regardless of what was arranged at the beginning of the meeting. Hence, they make any attempt to carry out (also by force) even those actions

² However, it should be stressed that the most brutal incidents of violence took place outside the agency, during the *trips*.

which were clearly rejected by the female worker. A sign of objectifying the female workers is also by clients' expectations that intercourse will take place for the whole time he has paid for, with no breaks for rest or a change of a position to one less exhausting for the woman. Another example can be the client demanding a sexual service regardless of the situation (e.g. problems getting an erection). As a result, the clients depersonalize the female workers, treating them not as people but as a "reacting object" which serves to fulfill all of their sexual desires:

I lit a cigarette and he says this, "Fuck. I don't pay you to smoke cigarettes, I pay for fucking." [R2]

The hardest part is when, let's say, a guy has these requirements that it is a full hour, or demands changes of positions and other stuff, and when you tell him, for example, that maybe we will do it another way, or do it like this, because it is somehow painful for me, they don't agree because they paid for it. [R5]

In the case of these types of relations, it is not possible to negotiate the interaction conditions and recognize the partner's subjectivity that I described in the previous chapter. As a result, violence was quite a common experience for my interviewees, perceived as an element of the *work situation*, *the professional risk* that you need to get used to:

Unpleasant situations also happen. You need to keep it in mind in this profession. [R5]

For the other categories of workers in the agency, the "unpleasant situations" were not so much incidents but rather an element of everyday risk. Therefore, in the observed venues, violence towards the sex workers was not always met with the proper reaction of the other workers. Even if a client was "punished" by the security workers, the victim remained with these experiences alone. It was often the case that even the female coworkers, who theoretically should be empathic towards the hurt colleagues and support them, behaved as spectators. They commented on the situation neutrally, or even blamed the victim for the incident ("she screamed too silently, it was noisy in the agency," "she shouldn't have answered him in such a rude manner," "you need to be careful with him"). Blaming the victim (Aronson et al. 1997: 564) may prove insensitivity towards acts of violence as a result of a long-term experience with such situations (Aronson et al. 1997: 514). At the same time, it may express the defensive attributions applied by the interviewees, according to which violence happens only to those who provoked it in some way (Aronson et al. 1997: 207). The acts of violence in an escort agency are not stigmatized or penalized in the same way it happens in other relations between workers and clients in service professions. The belief

about this “natural character” of violence in such places is often shared by the people who should defend the victims as representatives of the state (e.g. the police). Therefore, the interaction safety depends mostly on the security guards and female workers, who undertake interactions with clients despite their uncertainty and feeling of threat:

This work is always connected to some risks in general, with reputation, and with everything, but simply here there is bigger money, and the girls take a risk this way. There is always a danger. [R14]

6.3.2. Preventive and defensive actions undertaken by female workers

The awareness that risk is “always” present makes it necessary to *monitor* the actions taken by the clients. It seems that continuously focusing on their own security is a common feature of all kinds of sex work (cf. Sanders 2005a). In the case of the women that I researched, it means following a principle of *minimal trust* towards the clients, and taking an array of *preventive actions*, carried out from the first moments of the interaction until the man leaves the venue. The most important are the *categorization and selection* of clients *in the lounge* and eliminating potentially risky services (even if the agency permits them). Many of the women I spoke to did not accept *trips* to hotels or private flats (or they expected a much higher rate as compensation for the risk they suffer):

If there are any trips, I need a bodyguard, for example, and there’s this danger that if I simply take this trip, the bodyguard will leave you, and anything may happen at any given moment, right? Because you are left alone with the client, and not until you have a problem can you go and call for the bodyguard to pick you up, but you’ll not always manage to do this. I had this situation once that I was simply beaten up and I didn’t manage to do it at all; they took my phone, I didn’t see it. The door closed and I had no way to go out. [R14]

In the case of some interviewees (especially those who had experienced an attack from a client) the feeling of danger was very high. Despite cooperating with the security guards in the described scope, they also chose to employ additional protective measures (e.g. tear gas brought to meetings with clients). Unfortunately, none of the researched women knew any self-defense techniques which might help them in difficult situations *in the room*. Therefore, the main lines of defense against risky behaviors of the clients were intuition and experience, negotiating skills, and finally the intervention of the security guards. It was typical to attach the key role to intuition in the statements made by the interviewees reporting the

manners of preventing some dangerous interactions with clients.³ The decisions about who to go *to the room* with, or whether to enter the flat of a client who ordered *the trip*, were made on the basis of a hunch:

I feel it. For example, when I was going to a client, to his home, I knew if this was a place I could enter or not. Really, where I could get hurt and where not. [...] I and didn't go into those places. I used to tell the boss who took me, "I won't go there. And that's it". I mean I didn't tell him that I might get hurt, I just said I wouldn't go there. "Send another girl, because I'm not going in. End of story." And I didn't go in. [R47]

You need to feel the client, you know, although everybody knows that if there's a misunderstanding then I go first. I always stand between the attacker and the victim. I go in the middle and chase them away. [...] But when I see that the situation is tense, I also don't take a risk, I also have something to lose. I have only one set of teeth, and I wouldn't look too good without them, or with a crooked nose [laughter]. But this is what you need to feel. It's from years of observation, but this may also result from my personality, I like observing people. Their behavior. I know when I'm in danger and when I'm not, when I can let myself do something and when I can't, when I simply should go away. But it's more often the case, you know, that the clients stop doing this. [R20]

Therefore, feelings and intuition are not metaphysical categories. It is rather a combination of experience gained by the female worker, their skills of deep observations and the ability to analyze non-verbal signals within the course of the interactions with clients:

I know it from my experience that when, for example, you answer so many phone-calls, you already KNOW how substantive and moderately intelligent a client is. And relatively calm. And then you can feel that he is, for example, no danger. [R38]

I am not capable of assessing the degree to which the female workers' feelings were right. However, I would like to draw attention to the process of *minimizing the risk*, the important element of which is the belief that a *dangerous client* can be recognized. This feeling allows a female worker to interact with the clients despite the *context of threat* in which they take place. A female worker armed with trust of her judgment⁴ is more self-confident during an interaction and treats a client according to the definition of *relatively safe*. Following the principles of self-fulfilling prophecy (cf. Aronson et al. 1997: 143), it may really allow the woman to

³ Also, the research results suggest that intuition or instinct were treated by women providing sex services in numerous cases as the only precautionary measure while accepting the clients (cf. Murphy, Venkatesh 2006: 140).

⁴ I am referring to female workers with a certain level of experience in dealing with clients – the *beginning* ones are usually deprived of this experience and they feel this lack badly.

increase her level of safety. On the other hand, excessive self-confidence and the belief that nothing bad can happen may incline the female worker towards risky behaviors:

I had been going on these trips for so long that when I came to this job, here, everyone was surprised that I was so brave, for example, that I'm not afraid of anything. And, for example, when I was in the apartment, I welcomed clients at night as well, if there were any, and I wasn't afraid. [R47]

The female workers' negotiating skills are of crucial importance, apart from intuition. It is important especially during interactions *in the room*, where "the girl may count only on herself" [R49]. The first step in taking appropriate *defensive actions* is to assess a situation as dangerous or safe. It should be stressed that the interviewees (apart from extreme cases, e.g., rape, battery) defined a *dangerous situation* differently. It means that some female workers recognized such behavior as a "natural" (in that you need to get used to, but not accept it) element of agency work, while it definitely meant crossing the border for others. The beginning workers usually had problems with designating and maintaining boundaries when dealing with clients. The reasons were their poor mental condition resulting from the perception of the self through the prism of social stigma and the "prostitute" image – someone who has no right to protest, regardless of what a client wants:

At the beginning I was like, you know, the client will ALWAYS know that a girl is new. It doesn't happen that a client goes with a girl and doesn't know that she is new. Because a new girl acts differently than a girl who has worked here for a while. You become more courageous with every day, month, that's for sure. It comes with time. At the beginning, I was, you know, very POLITE. When I remind myself of my second client, he was TERRIBLE, he fucked me badly, and if he fucked me that way now, he would simply be kicked out of here. But I was new then, I didn't know if I was allowed to do that, to YELL at him. I thought that because he paid me, he could do it, and I didn't say anything. And now I know what I CAN and what I CAN'T do. I WOULDN'T LET myself do it to now. [R6]

However, the workers with more experience may also have a different feeling of what a *dangerous situation* means. This change results from comparing their own experiences with those from significant others (Ziółkowski 1981: 73) and the manner of defining a safety norm in the reference group (Shibutani 1962, 1976; Kuhn 1976; Łoś 1976a; Ziółkowski 1981). Traumatic incidents from their own or their co-workers' past modify the meaning of currently experienced acts of violence. Actions which are perceived by *novice* workers as unbearable may seem not so bad for more experienced workers. Perceiving and defining what happens during a meeting with a client also changes when a worker is under the influence of psychoactive substances. Numerous studies prove that workers under

the influence of alcohol are more prone to violence, as their ability to recognize risk is lower, and they have fewer chances to free themselves or run when they are attacked by a client (Antoniszyn, Marek 1985; Špila 2006: 80; George, Stoner, 2000 after Li, Li, Stanton 2010: 194). The risk of aggressive behavior towards the workers also grows, when the clients are under the influence of alcohol (de Graaf et al. 1995 after: Li, Li, Stanton 2010: 194).

If the female workers define the situation *in the room* as dangerous, it remains open to decide whether and how to respond. In the situation of a direct attack and threat to life, it is an instinctive response to attempt to run away and call for help. However, if the situation is not so serious (yet), the female worker's decision and the measures she takes depend on her evaluation of several dimensions of the interaction. One of them is the dynamics of dangerous behaviors of the client during the course of the meeting. The female worker evaluates it while observing whether these behaviors fade, are stable or escalate. Other dimensions include evaluating the intensity of the client's aggressive behaviors (from low to even critical) and whether the female worker is capable of *bearing* them and can finish the meeting or not. An example of such an estimate may be the pain experienced during sexual intercourse. I spoke to numerous female workers who complained about pain after a meeting with a client, although they saw it as a "normal" element of this work. Therefore, painful sexual intercourse itself was not a sufficient reason for most of the female workers to cease the interaction. Not until they found it *unbearable* did they take any action:

I don't need to do it this way [pause] with pain. I say to him, "Man, stop it, it HURTS." And I had this kind of a situation. I needed to tell him that, because the pain was beyond bearable. Because you can bear it up to a point. [R42]

Another important dimension is the female worker's estimation of the possibilities to *contain* an aggressive client, i.e., to evaluate how risky, in her opinion, it would be to undertake *defensive actions*, and whether the benefit brought by breaking this dangerous interaction would be higher than the costs of intervention. Significant differences in this respect occur whether a client is a *regular* in a venue or not. If he is a frequent guest, the female worker, based on her previous experiences (her own or her coworkers'), may find out how he behaves *in the room*, and how to deal with him.

There was this one guy here who was actually in prison for violence towards his mother. He was VERY bad to the girls, so we always prayed that we could MAKE HIM DRUNK. So, he goes to sleep and that's it, because he spoke badly, pulled our hair. He mistreated his mother, so what can you say? If he mistreated his mother – he BEAT her – he WON'T BE any good to a woman. He LEFT the money, but that was not the point. We were afraid to stay with him alone in the room, which is why the door was always ajar, so the security guy knew if something was going on and he could respond at any time. But the girls tried. They needed to have a psychological

approach to him, to approach him somehow, to patch the situation up, because it was stressful to be with such a person. [R53]

The female workers carefully select their actions in such situations. There is the possible loss of a client at stake if he feels offended with the applied measures:

You know, he'll be drunk and mean or aggressive today, and if you offend him then he'll get pissed off and won't come here anymore, and he can come here and be with a girl for like seven or eight hours. So, you also need to look at it that he leaves the money. [R32]

In the case of client who is not a *regular*, it is hard to predict his behavior *in the room* and his response to possible *defensive actions* taken by the female workers. In such a situation, the safest route seems to be to take careful *covenantal actions*:

You never know how a client is. He can be so nervous that he may hurt YOU, because you don't know anything about the men you're dealing with. There are these guys who take revenge. There's no point. He can damage your reputation by writing something unpleasant on a forum, for example. You won't have any clients at all. You always need to solve those conflicts somehow amicably. [R36]

The most significant variable that influences how active a female worker is in her involvement in *defensive actions* is how she assesses her negotiation skills and whether she believes that she is capable of coping with a client. This, in turn, is related to the *work situation* in a given venue (conditions agreed on by *the boss*, security guards and female coworkers). They can contribute to assertive behaviors towards clients or the submission of the female workers.

A female worker's response to the inappropriate behavior of a client is not a simple chain composed of a stimulus and a response. It is a result of calculating the risks and costs of undertaking specific *defensive actions*, and their adjustment to a particular situation and a particular client. As a result, there are two types of strategies undertaken by the female workers towards the aggressive behaviors of clients that can be distinguished.

6.4. STRATEGIES OF FEMALE WORKERS TOWARDS AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIORS OF CLIENTS

6.4.1. Passive strategy

The female workers who adopt the *passive strategy* do not undertake any negotiations with a client during a meeting. They adopt an attitude of *passive acceptance* of what is going on *in the room*. It is often the women who have

just started their sex work who adopt this attitude, unaware that they can exert an active impact on the course of the meeting. Additionally, they have not yet acquired the skill of impression management (Goffman 2000), so the client feels their fear (“It’s the worst if a guy feels that a girl is scared” [R20]).

On the other hand, *submission* is also a way to deal with a situation when female workers believe that they can influence a given client’s behavior. Then, they attempt to “get through” to the end of the meeting, avoiding any kind of negotiations. Hence, they agree to a lot of things, believing that this would prevent an escalation of the client’s emotions and protect them from his outbursts of anger:

When I go with a client to the room, I try to make him cum as quickly as possible. I do what he wants so he would be calm. [R7]

This is also how some of the experienced female workers act. They had made some attempts to negotiate with clients in the past; however, as these attempts ended unsuccessfully, they do not believe they will be successful during subsequent meetings and they decide not to do it in advance. Such behaviors were presented by those female workers who had experienced violence in relationships with their partners in their personal lives. It might be the case that submission towards the clients reflected the patterns that were already developed outside the agency, when “resistance” meant a risk of greater injuries. This hypothesis should be developed in further studies. However, it needs to be stressed that the *passive strategy* was often adopted in venues of an *oppressive management style*. A female worker could not count on support and understanding from *the boss* if she tried to oppose the clients.

It is also worth paying attention to the financial situation of the female workers in this context, as it influences the degree of *selectiveness* while choosing clients, and the readiness to oppose the client’s actions *in the room*. The attitude of *submission* among the interviewees was often demonstrated by those female workers who found themselves in a difficult financial situation, as the potential *complaint* submitted by an unsatisfied client and the need to return (at least a part of) the paid amount was an intense loss that they could not afford to suffer. In the case of some female workers, this *passive acceptance* of actions undertaken by a client was a strategy to maximize the profits. It allowed them to win those clients who were not accepted by the female workers making a more *selective choice*:

I already know that the girls who allow clients to do everything have A LOT OF clients, because the guys can take out their frustrations on the girls. [R36]

There are sometimes these moments that a guy is simply IRRITATING. It hurts and irritates when he touches you, and you feel like getting out of the bed and saying,

“Leave me alone,” or just punch his face [pause]. Yeah. And there are some things you do for money, despite the fact that you don’t like it, that it HURTS. Apart from the fact that sometimes it IS NOT as it should be. [R42]

Adopting this strategy, though allowing the women to avoid a confrontation with a client, makes her need to deal with her own emotions during a meeting. One of the basic ways is to suppress one’s emotions (cf. Gorzko 2005: 13) and to “grit one’s teeth”:

Sometimes, even though he should be here for an hour, you’ve had enough after 40 minutes, but you need to make it to the end, you need to grit your teeth and make it through, unless a girl doesn’t allow herself to be pushed around. Some clients come here to get revenge, but I don’t know on who. On women in general? You need to watch out. [R17]

Also, after the objectifying interaction is over, a woman must work the meeting through, rebuild her self-esteem, and thus cope with the suffered mental costs. It is possible thanks to a redefinition of the event and a rationalization of the clients’ behavior (Hochschild 2009):

The client said, “You bitch, why did I even come here, I hate you.” But I was never worried about what such a client said. I didn’t actually think about it, but I said to myself that if a client is sick, there’s no point in arguing with him. [R7]

The team character of agency work is significant for the success of these actions. Thanks to the fact that there are also other coworkers, it is possible to *badmouth the client*, which – apart from *the catharsis effect* – plays an additional role of exchanging information about *troublesome clients*:

I didn’t swear at the beginning, but now I need to go out and swear a little, “What an idiot, what a moron,” and that’s it, it’ll go away later. Or I say to the girls, “Oh, this idiot has come.” So, I can get it off my chest sometimes. [R53]

Unfortunately, adopting this strategy in the longer term requires that the women seek an additional way of suppressing their emotions and *become desensitized*. The interviewees who adopted the *passive strategy* usually overused psychoactive substances to “chill” before and after work. However, as a result, their position during a meeting with clients was even weaker. Following the principle of a vicious circle, it exposed them to an even higher risk and they were inclined to be more *submissive* with a client. It also accelerated the process of the female workers’ professional burnout and maximized the risk of health-related dangers.

6.4.2. Strategy of active actions

In the case of the described *passive strategy*, the female worker does not defend any boundaries of acceptable behaviors that she determined. She sometimes does not even determine them at all, as she does not know or believe that she can maintain them. A completely different perspective is adopted by the female workers who carry out (as far as possible) the *active actions strategy*. They are focused on negotiation and the enforcement of interaction principles with the available means. The quote below shows how different those two perspectives are:

I think that men's behavior depends on the woman, that's what I think. [...] I think that a guy here gets what a girl allows herself to give him. [...] Because she is the worker here, and the client is a guy who only comes here. And he's got these boundaries before he come he knows what he can. Approximately, what he can allow himself to do. [...] This is the matter of character and approach to the client. The client also looks at the girl, checks if he can do something more or less, this is what I think, this is pure psychology. [R45]

The interviewees who adopted the *active actions strategy* shared the belief that also the female worker has a right to dictate her conditions and require the client to respect them during an interaction. However, enforcement of those postulated may bring many difficulties:

The clients also try to find the boundaries. You need to determine them very clearly, because the guys very quickly use [sadly] some things. When you say that you can't do that, they still try to cross the line that a girl won't accept. It's also not simple because you need to maintain your stance and watch that he doesn't cross the line. And this is where the problem begins. [R42]

Protecting one's own *boundaries* is possible in various ways. Below I would like to present those that I observed during my research.

6.4.2.1. Gentle persuasion

Gentle persuasion is when a female worker who is not *submissive* towards the client does not stand openly against him if he breaks the rules of the meeting. She uses gentle negotiations, playing the role of a weaker and actually a subordinate partner, but one who expects better treatment. Such actions are undertaken when the negative behavior of a client is not too intensive, but still so burdensome that a female worker decides to respond. She also comes to the conclusion that the *client value* is high enough, and she should not repulse him; thus, the adopted means are relatively gentle. This response is rooted in the belief that the female

worker's negotiating skills will allow her to deal with a client, and will not provoke him to use more aggressive actions, and in the case of a failure, the other workers of the venue will support her.

The female worker usually develops her negotiating position by shortening the distance to the client and *fraternizing* with him. Afterward, she calmly *cools down his emotions* and gently stresses his unacceptable behavior. This may be called *taming, patiently winning the client over*:

It depends on human culture how you approach a CLIENT. Because the guys are different, really different. [...] He may be, I don't know, bold or something, but you need to get on top of things so he melts [a flirty smile], really. [...] You need to explain it to him [with belief]. Politely, with class, really. And this is how you can win a client over, really. [R47]

A common trick is to adopt a stereotypical role of a lost little woman, *a poor girl*:

I have this way to deal with them, I'm like, "You see, I suck" [with a voice of a disappointed girl] [him:] "No, no" [eagerly] [her:] "No, I'm no good at it" [him:] "No, no, it's my fault" [laughter] You need to feel the guy. [R20]

Another way is to recall a work perspective during negotiations to demonstrate that the *boundaries* determined by the female worker are not a whimsey that she could change under pressure from the client's, rather, they are simply one of the rules of the venue. In such a situation, the client should subordinate to them ("I can't change it, I'm only a worker; the boss won't like it" [R32]).

Therefore, a basic principle of the interaction is to dampen the emotions and not cause emotional contagion. A female worker should keep her emotions in check, regardless of how upset or outraged she feels:

The client is dealt with psychologically. If he's aggressive, you need to do it politely, with class, and then the client sits down. Because you won't achieve anything with aggression. He gets even more outraged, and he becomes even more aggressive. And if there's an aggressive girl who likes to talk back, then the client will not get along at all with her, and I don't know, there might be a fight! You can cope with everything when you're calm. I've never had such a situation, really, and I've had different clients. There were some aggressive ones, but I approached them calmly. When something happens, you just leave the room, but you stay in when everything is all right. [R49]

A motif that was repeated in the statements made by the interviewees who adopted this technique is the personal culture of the sex workers, understood as the ability to conduct a conversation. This allows them to deal with each client and situation:

It depends on how you approach a client. Everything is all right if you have an appropriate approach. And when there are girls who really talk back, behave in a vulgar way, it's simple. It is like it is, and it won't be the way it should. Because the client simply defends himself. Because if a girl has the wrong approach, nothing will be as it should be. [R47]

Having the right approach to a client requires experience in emotional labor (Hochschild 2009). Therefore, a female worker is capable of distancing herself from a situation, not taking the aggressive behaviors of clients personally, treating the interaction as a task that needs to be faced. An invaluable way of discharging some negative emotions of both the client and the female worker is also to weave jokes and (also situational) humor into an interaction (cf. Sanders 2004b).

If a female worker is effective in her negotiations, her feeling of control over the situation with the client grows. This may also incline her to adopt some persuasive techniques in those moments when it would be safer to abandon the interaction or call for help:

There is always this danger. For example, I had this situation here that this drunk guy came in, and he was really stoned and drunk. And I went with him because he paid for an hour, he sat on me and held my neck. I thought he would fuck me up. Of course, I could have yelled, called a security guy, etc., but I simply didn't want that because I didn't want to panic. So, there's no fuss and so on. So, I approached it diplomatically and it was like he let go of me [sighs]. I told him, "If you have this thing that you feel satisfied when you hit a woman, do it. Beat me up." So he let go of me, he didn't beat me up; but you remember that there are weirdos out there. [R14]

6.4.2.2. Confrontation actions

In some specific conditions, the female workers undertook *confrontation actions*, which involve openly expressing dissatisfaction with the client's behavior. They were employed when a situation *in the room* was not yet dangerous, or the client's position in the meeting was weak, and the female worker felt strong enough to intervene. Such behaviors were preventive in nature, so a given client does not try more unpleasant behaviors in the course of further interactions. They adopted the form of open, even demonstrative calls to consider the female worker's perspective and to treat her subjectively. They were intended to "sober the client up" and force him to change his behavior. Such actions are a sign of disagreement with the clients' behavior, but they also allow the female to work off her submissive attitude from the initial work period. The belief that she can oppose the clients emerges gradually, along with gained experience, growing assertiveness and mental resistance, the ability to respond and defend herself, in both

physical and mental terms. At the same time, the female worker's trust towards her own assessment of when such action will be safe begins to increase:

I'm like, more direct now, and [pause] assertive. Because when I say, "I don't want it, that's it". When he tells me to do this or that, I will do it if I want to, but if I don't want it, I won't do it. It's not like if you pay you can do everything you can dream of, just because he paid. Never in my life. Because you can easily be manipulated by a client here. [R40]

A motif that is the basis for sex workers' actions is to defend their identity and self-esteem. This happens through making the clients follow the subjective treatment and respect, understood as not crossing *the boundaries* determined by the female workers. It seems that the key to those actions is a change in the manner of thinking about themselves. Therefore, the female workers started to perceive themselves as people who *deserve* to be treated appropriately, regardless of their occupation:

The clients also sometimes think that they are paying for this time and we become their possession. But it's not true. We bring them down to earth. Because they think we need to do everything. But each of us has her own principles that she won't break. That's why they're sometimes surprised. [...] They sometimes treat us as objects [...] A girl who is mentally weak may not know how to, I don't know, may not know her value. Because you need to respect yourself, despite all of this. If YOU respect yourself, others will respect you as well, because you won't let them do too much. If you mark your boundaries at the very beginning, even during the meetings, at most he may not come back. That's what I think. Too bad. It's too bad if he doesn't respect me. [R36]

The strive to maximize profit is often in conflict with the subjectivity principle and having respect towards oneself. Being afraid of losing a client may lead a female worker to the *submission strategy*, which is destructive in the longer term. Therefore, each female worker must identify her own point of balance between striving to increase her earnings (also by agreeing to the objectifying behavior of clients) and the defense of her subjectivity. The interviewees who had managed to work this notion through and changed how they defined prostitution, presented particular manifestations during the interviews which concerned the principles of dealing with clients they had developed:

We have our value. It's not like someone can walk over me and shit on me because I'm here. It's not like that. You simply need to have your own dignity. Even in this job. I also try to instill this in the clients. The fact that he comes here doesn't mean that I'll do everything and that I'm only for him, and if he tells me to jump then I jump. It's not like this at all. [R38]

We had this incident yesterday, when these three guys came, about forty years old, dressed nicely. Two were all right but the third one was really impolite and so OFFENSIVE towards us that I simply went to the locker room, saying nothing, I just said that I simply wouldn't be servicing them. I won't allow them to abuse me just because I work here. Each of us has feelings. That's why he should BUZZ OFF, go somewhere else. So no other girl serviced them, and they had to leave. We ALSO have some rules. We won't let others, mmm to put us down or anything. The truth is that we just work here. [R41]

Such voices became persuasive statements during interviews and spontaneous conversations in the group of coworkers. They allowed the speakers to make sure that how they behaved was right, but also to influence other (especially *the beginning*) female workers to take the same course. Adopting such a perspective is reflected in the actions taken towards the clients that can be called "games for dignity" (Gorzko 2005: 10). When their self-esteem is threatened, the female workers undertake some intensive negotiations on their status in the interaction. It is often the case that they demonstrate a *strong negotiation position* from the very first moments *in the room* as to communicate to the client that he cannot disregard them as partners in interaction:

You need to be tough here because if you're soft and you show it...That's why I go in and I'm a sharp girl right away, nice but sharp. The clients sometimes even tell me, "But you could be nicer," and I'm like, "We'll see." [R18]

But you know what, I'll tell you that you need to have a strong character for this job, because you know, if you're like a namby-pamby, the client will recognize you instantly. You need to have a tough character, a tough heart, not a tough ass, because it cannot be the other way around. [...]. You simply can't allow the client to walk over you. I'm telling you, if he feels you, he'll do everything, he'll walk all over you. I mean, metaphorically speaking. And if you don't let him walk over you, so he knows, he's got a brake, he knows he can't walk over you because you can cope with him, right? [R35]

6.4.2.3. *Ultimatum*

A way to keep control over the course of interaction is also the *ultimatum* presented to the client. At the beginning of the meeting, the female worker clearly marks the boundaries that the client is politely but firmly warned to follow. If he does not change his behavior, the female worker develops an *ultimatum*, in an already less polite manner, determining the conditions to be met if the clients wants the interaction to be carried on. If a client keeps on ignoring the boundaries, the female worker adopts the measures she warned him about. It is usually a threat

of leaving the room and informing the security guards about the client's behavior (which actually means the threat of using physical strength):

I sometimes go for him in the room, "If you don't stop right away, I'M GOING OUT." AND I GO OUT. "GOODBYE. But I won't give your money back. You paid but I told you where the boundaries are." They also need to be taught the consequences; otherwise they can walk all over us. [R42]

I'm like, "I'll be screaming so loud that you'll be kicked out, the boys will come." I let him know. [R17]

I always threaten the clients that if anything goes wrong, I'll go to the police. [R18]

It is crucial for the success of this strategy to carry it out to the end, meaning to assertively express the objection and enforce the announced ultimatum. If a female worker is capable of doing it, the client *learns* that he cannot allow himself to behave in such a manner (which is not necessarily reflected in a change in the way he treats other female workers). However, this requires a female worker to be ready to accept the consequences of the undertaken actions, e.g., losing a client, the need to return part of the money or listen to the excuses of *the boss* related to *the complaint*. Therefore, *the ultimatum* is employed in situations where the intensity of the client's unaccepted actions does not decrease and makes the interaction unbearable:

I had this one guy. It was only 15 minutes that I was with him, and a needed to give him his money back. I couldn't bear it. He was vulgar, he threw me around like a doll, so I said that either he stops or he leaves. "So give me my money back." But we were here for 15 minutes and I didn't give him back that portion [...] I kept it for myself, and I gave him back the rest [sadly] "But I didn't cum" [mocks his voice]. But what do I care? [with anger] He should meet a sex doll. And I don't know if a sex doll would bear it. [R46]

It should also be stressed that the definite and assertive presentation of the *ultimatum* often plays a preventive role and calms the client down, so he stops behaving dangerously.

6.4.2.4. Degradation of the client

Another action undertaken by the interviewees was *degradation* of a client by undermining his self-esteem. This is how the female workers deal with clients who provoke problems during interactions *in the room*, but who are not aggressive, which makes the female workers feel strong and confident. *The degradation techniques* are adopted not only in relation to troublesome clients, but also to-

wards those who have a weak position in the interaction.⁵ When *degrading* the client, the female worker needs to mentally compensate for those interactions where they needed to demonstrate some *submission*.

Performing such actions is interesting as the female worker somehow reverses the stereotypical interaction between a “prostitute” and a “client”. She is the one who adopts the role of a person who humiliates and often also objectifies the client. The most frequent form of verbal aggression adopted by the clients is using some vulgar synonyms of the word “prostitute” to describe the female workers. In turn, a response from the sex workers is adopting the same weapon, i.e., referring to the stereotypical image of a client as a loser who needs to pay for sex:

It’s my character that if he tugs me, I’m like, “HARDER! Why so delicate?” I’m like, “Does it get you off? Go on then! But I’ll give the same back.”Ooooh, ok, no. He can see that I’m really self-confident, especially towards guys. Even if someone puts me down, I’m like, “Listen, you are not able to call me names to make me feel moved [...] You pay for this here [with contempt] so you can say whatever the fuck you want about me. I can be a whore for you, but it’s you who is paying for this [with satisfaction]. I don’t want to tell you that but I’m not sure who is the bigger sucker here [with satisfaction].”You know, if it’s really hardcore. And some of them get wrongheaded when they hear the word loser, and sometimes they soften after such conversations. But as I say, you can’t talk like that to everyone. You know, tell a guy who was imprisoned for most of his life, tell him he’s a sucker, it’s not the best situation, although I’m sure that I can handle him. But you know, even if there’s the strongest woman and a weak man, the man will always have a chance to win. So, you just need to balance it somehow. [R20]

A similar result is achieved by drawing attention to the symmetrical character of roles of a “prostitute” and a “john.” In the common perspective, the stigma related to prostitution is attached only to those who provide sex services. It touches the clients to a significantly lesser degree or not at all. The female workers, if provoked by the client, can remind him that a part of this social odium also touches him:

There was this one guy who called me names at the end when he was leaving, that I was a bitch, a whore, [sadly, pause] And I was like, “And who are you?” So he left, banging the doors. [R46]

A highly effective weapon that the female workers may use against the client is to humiliate them with arguments that refer to their sexual ability. Since complimenting in this scope is a basic technique which a female worker can use to

⁵ This situation is a mirror reflection of violence adopted by clients towards the female workers who are scared and insecure.

win some favor from the client (cf. Chapter 5), neutral behavior, direct criticism of the sex organ or laughing at the client's sex failure is a form of punishment for improper behavior during the interaction. Interviews with clients confirm that it is a highly sensitive sphere of interaction where it is the female worker who takes control over the meeting and can play it any way she wants.

This is where the matter of taking care of hygiene by the clients should be mentioned. Although negligence in terms of hygiene does not form a threat comparable to physical or verbal aggression, they are a premise of the objectifying attitude of some men. They treat the female workers as people for whom he does not have to maintain standards of hygiene, as all of them, regarding their social position and occupation, should not mind that. This neglect also proves that clients don't always perform the work that is expected of them (cf. Strauss et al. 1985; Konecki 1988). They should prepare for the visit in the venue appropriately, and perform the *work on their body* just like the woman providing the sex services. Otherwise, the female workers may point out the client's unacceptable behavior directly, with some harsh words. These messages are of an *educational* dimension, intended to *teach* a client how he should behave in an agency so the interaction goes smoothly:

When he's so stinky, I tell him, "You know what? You should be ashamed to come to the agency. You have well-cared-for girls, you've got stinky balls or dick, and it smells from your armpits, or your teeth are like, they just stink, don't blow into my face." And when he pounds me, I tell him not to blow into my face because it stinks, for example. Just like that. Or, "Go wash yourself one more time because you stink." And I'm not the only one who does that. You know, it's impossible to go to bed with a stinky guy. It's impossible! So you go to the room, leave him a towel, you go out for a minute, you come back, and the whole room smells. Of him. It reeks. The fact that he pays does not mean that you need to go with a smelly guy! [R3]

The degradation and humiliation of a client who violates the standards of interaction *in the room* are facilitated by the situational advantage that results from a worker's position in the organization. When using their organizational knowledge, the women can perform some actions which are intended to rebuild the violated or questioned value of "self" (Gorzko 2005: 14):

I had this guy once, you know, a pair of Armani jeans, a shirt, he paid for an hour and didn't leave me a tip. I did what he wanted, you know. He's a macho. He got dressed and left the room. And the guy usually waits for us, before we clean up the bedlinen, the bed sheet, a towel. You know, so this macho went out, but I didn't go after him. You know, I cleaned up, sat for a while, smoked, and not until then did I let him out. He was just standing at the door [the entrance door of the venue can be opened only by a worker who knows the code, both from the inside and outside – note by I.Š.]. I did it because he just left! [R2]

6.4.2.5. *Emotion for emotion*

Another technique can be called *emotion for emotion*. It takes place when a client commits a gross violation of principles, while a female worker cannot or is incapable (regarding the psychoactive substances she might have taken or professional burnout) of controlling her emotions. Thus, she allows herself to be provoked, or in extreme cases, she provokes open conflict herself. This technique involves responding to the client's negative emotions with the same negative emotions, which escalates the conflict and leads to subsequent forms of aggression, arguments, and fights. These actions, like the *degradation* of a given man, can be a substitute response to the aggression of another client, who it would be impossible to employ it towards. They also tend to be a premise of problems with *balancing one's involvement* in prostitution, which becomes visible through heightened nervousness and responding with aggression even to minor incidents:

It is usually the girls who have worked here for longer that behave this way [aggressively – a note by I.Š.] because they are tired with work, but there's no rule, because it depends on whether someone takes some things personally or not. Because, like I say, I don't take it too personally, so I take some things with a pinch of salt, because why would I want to take all of this personally? [R53]

6.4.3. **The strategies of female workers towards aggressive behaviors of clients – final remarks**

The presented ways of responding to the dangerous behaviors of clients are not typical for every female worker (although they may employ one way more often than the other). The women usually adjust to a given situation on an ongoing basis (to its dynamics, to the perception of the client and how they perceive themselves). In the case of each meeting, a female worker makes a decision about what actions to undertake – whether or not she will “clench her teeth” and bear what the client does, thereby avoiding confrontation, or make the effort and resist, but may avoid some more serious problems related to an aggressive and unpleasant interaction.

The actions undertaken by the female workers can be ordered into a certain sequence, from incidents in the form of a client's unacceptable behavior, through a moderate and neutral *persuasive* reaction which –if it fails to bring the expected result – is replaced by more direct *confrontation actions*. The manner of *keeping a client under control* is ordered on a gradual continuum and employed one after the other, regarding whether and how the interaction gets more critical. It is crucial for the success of the actions to adjust them to a particular situation and

a particular client. It is possible thanks to observation, *feeling the client*, as well as trial and error. In this case, the agency's more experienced female workers have an advantage over *the beginning* ones. They can provide them with some instruction related to how an interaction with a client should be managed:

You need to know who you can lash out to. Some girls drink alcohol sometimes, but they shouldn't. "What can he do to me?" "Actually he can smash you, and no one will answer your call. You're so strong, huh? How many fights have you had in your life? And you're still lashing out. What for? You'll get a punch, and no one will help you, even when security comes. He'll knock your teeth out. Why do you need it?" [R20]

This is how the female workers with more experience perform the professional socialization (also through tales about clients) in the scope of sex work safety (cf. Chapter 3). It is important, as *the beginning* female workers often cannot imagine that a client can behave in such an aggressive manner. Thanks to interactions in the worker's group, its members learn and share the experiences of the idiosyncrasies of a given work environment. This "local knowledge" generated socially during interactions, increases the work safety (Konecki 1988).

However, it should be mentioned here that the female coworkers may also provoke violent actions towards their colleagues (cf. Chapter 3). The results of other studies prove that it is the coworkers, apart from the relatives, clients and random passers-by, who are mainly responsible for the aggression towards women providing sexual services (Gilchrist, Cameron, Scoular 2005: 390).

6.5. HOW TO DEAL WITH DIFFICULT EXPERIENCES

All the interviewees taking part in my research experienced some actions that harmed their subjectivity while providing sexual services. I described how the women prevent and respond to such incidents above; however, the consequences of working in such an environment remain a separate issue. From the interviewees' perspective, a form of defense against the mental consequences of working in the agency is a *strong psyche*. It means the ability not to take the client's words and behaviors personally, *not to think about* what happened *in the room*, to redefine negative interactions, and to quickly (although it is a relative notion) *get over* the difficult experiences. The *strong psyche* is shaped as a result of experiences at work and a certain kind of *freezing the emotion* (similar to dissociation during sexual encounters, Sztobryn-Giercuszkiewicz 2004: 121). It may also be the case that character features and previous life experiences (e.g. difficult, violent family relations) also influence it, but those issues should be verified during further research. As suggested by my studies, the female workers who determined that they have a *strong psyche* dealt more effectively with work with clients, and they

were more successful in their negotiations. In turn, the women with a *weak psyche* found themselves in different kinds of trouble sooner or later:

People with a weak psyche will not cope here for sure. Or they will end up drinking, not to think. There are different ways to run away from all of this, so you don't think, "Oh my God, what am I doing?" I wouldn't recommend it if you're weak. Or they are incapable of getting out of this, and they will stay in the same place for lower and lower rates. And it keeps getting worse. [R36]

Sometimes the girls can't deal with it mentally [more silently and sadly – note by IS], but I think, if I was in their shoes, I wouldn't work in such a place at all. If they can't bear it mentally. [...] But it depends on the girl. I'm mentally resistant to everything. I think no one can break me or something. [...] I have strong mental resistance to everything. [R47]

The strong psyche – while helping to deal with difficult interactions – allows a female worker to carry on with her involvement in prostitution. This happens because one of the important motives for leaving – the mental burden related to this work – is not experienced as strongly. Therefore, the female workers remain in the agency for longer, which, in turn, exposes them to other acts of violence.

For many female workers who did not have this *strong psyche*, a way to embrace their negative emotions was to drink alcohol, or to take drugs and antidepressant medications prescribed by a psychiatrist or obtained differently:

NOT ALL can get resistant. NOT ALL can harden. Let me put it this way – one will harden or get resistant, and the other won't, she can even get worse. So I can point out the girls who had a mental breakdown, who are seeing a psychiatrist or something. But they should think about themselves. And these are young girls. But what can you do? I don't know if they got used to it or what. So I say, the girls who shouldn't work but they do, they work here BY FORCE, they work BY FORCE. They cry, but they keep on working. And I've already said it to one of them, "Why would you work here at all? You're not suited to such a job, because you can't bear it mentally." And she's like, she needs to do this and that. And it is like it is. And a girl should have strong nerves here, to be mentally resistant, strong. Because if she's weak, she's simply GONE. There are DIFFERENT situations, DIFFERENT people. ALL kinds of people come here. [R47]

A lack of professional support is a problem for women who cannot deal with the difficult experiences when dealing with clients. Hence, they are left alone with some painful experiences. If there is a possibility, they can confide in their female coworkers. Turning for help to a person from outside the world of prostitution is related to such a great amount of stress that many women find it impossible to overcome it. The situation looks better if, in a given city, there are some organizations operating with people who provide sex services, and sex workers are

informed about the support they may count on from their side. It obviously does not solve the female worker's problems automatically, but it provides a chance for them to obtain effective support.

6.6. SUMMARY

Escort agencies in Poland are part of a different world, the everyday functioning of which is governed by local, informal regulations, not necessarily referring to police protection and legal rules. *Security work* is of a collective character in the agency. It requires involvement from all employees of the venue, although the scope of their actions as well as experiencing the consequences of *security work* are differentiated. First of all, the venue managers may see the need to invest in certified security guards (despite the fact it is an additional cost), keep using unprofessional employees or give up any using any kind of security at all. While agreeing on the scope of services and the principles of providing them in the venue, they can consider the female workers' safety (e.g. during *trips*) or strive just to maximize profits, also at the cost of the employed women. The security guards may also present a varied level of involvement in their work and the skill of dealing with a crisis. Regarding the kind of relationships that they build with the women providing sex services, they can be perceived as allies or enemies. Last but not least, *safety work* also depends on actions undertaken by the female workers, both in the collective and individual dimension. It is crucial whether the experienced workers introduce *the beginners* to the principles of working with a client, regarding the ability to control conflicts, cool down emotions, and to perform emotional labor. The significance of those actions is higher as, in the case of an attack from a client or suffering damage to their health, they cannot count on any form of financial support which might compensate for the losses suffered, however limited scope it might be. Hence, the female workers who become victims of violence need to face the mental and financial consequences of the incident on their own.

CONCLUSION

The provision of sex services in escort agencies is perceived in this book as a social activity. Regarding the adopted micro-social perspective, I focus on the interactional and processual approach to the work of women in escort agencies. It takes place in a specific and rationalized context, with the appropriate infra-structural background, negotiated rigor of work, and a system of relations among the social actors involved in running the venue. The applicable laws, traditions, culture, and customs of a given society provide a broader context.

The *work situation* of women who provide sex services in escort agencies is a process that is constructed, maintained and modified through interactions among the workers, and between workers and clients. It is composed of the working conditions (which embrace elements of the equipment, the development of the agency's space and its location), the work principles and remuneration terms for the female workers in addition to a system of penalties and sanctions.

The working conditions depend to the greatest extent on the actions undertaken by the agency's *boss*, who is responsible for creating an organizational framework. However, their shape is also influenced by the other actors of the world of escort agencies, trying to adjust them (through open negotiations or backstage actions) to their own needs and expectations. The scope of impact exerted by the workers depends to a high degree on the management style preferred by *the boss*, and *the strategies of coping* in given conditions developed by the female workers.

The organizational framework developed by *the boss* provides the basis which some informal principles and group norms of the female workers are built upon. They refer to the principles of interacting with *the boss*, the other workers and with clients. They govern the work process by influencing the level of rivalry for clients and facilitating/hindering the socialization process of a new female worker¹. Interactions in the group of coworkers (bound with rather weak ties; cf. Granovetter 1973) allow them to undertake some *work on the information*. They also facilitate the process of becoming familiar with, developing and maintaining rationalizations related to continuing to work in the agency. The *work situation* can also be influenced by interactions with other employees, especially the security workers. The women's safety during meetings with clients depends on their involvement in their work and the distance towards the other female workers.

The primary activity (Strauss 1978: 22) in the agency, and the source of income for all of its employees, is the work of women providing sex services during

¹ This also refers both to socialization for sex work and specificity of work in a given team at particular working conditions.

meetings with clients. How it takes place depends mostly on the framework determined by managers of the venue. In terms of clients, it depends on how they are categorised, as well as the principles, standards, and sanctions which are adopted, and the strategies of working with them, which are developed within the group of women providing sex services in a given venue. The actions undertaken by clients towards the female workers constitute another important aspect. The clients must cooperate for the work to be performed (Strauss et al. 1985): they need to partake in negotiations, adopt the female workers' perspective, and prepare their bodies for the meeting *in the room*. The listed elements influence the strategies that a given female worker undertakes towards a client, trying to obtain, maintain or regain control over his actions *in the room*, and to *manage* the meeting in such a manner as to derive maximum benefits with the minimum costs and risk.

How a given female worker finds herself in a given *work situation* and which actions and strategies she undertakes towards the interaction partners also depend on the stage of the process of involvement in the agency work that she is currently at. A female worker's knowledge about the specificity and risks related to agency work is different depending on if she is just starting out in the world of sex work or has experience. Therefore, she can exert some influence on the *work situation* in different ways.

Summing up, to understand the *work situation* of women in escort agencies, we should give some thought to all the listed elements, i.e., the objective working conditions; the processes of interaction, negotiation, cooperation, and rivalry among agency workers; interactions between workers and clients; and the transformation of the female worker's identity and position related to the changes in her involvement in agency work (Figure 3). As a result of these processes, the *work situation* – which the workers are both the participants and co-creators of – is generated and maintained.

Therefore, the *work situation* in an escort agency results from the joint actions of numerous people who guarantee the infrastructure, safety, flow of clients and, least but not least, those who provide the sex services (cf. Becker 1982: 34; see also Blumer 1969). Regarding the hierarchy of positions in the escort agency and the high fluctuation of personnel, it is crucial for particular team members (female workers, security workers, *the boss*) and clients to continually *adjust*. The continuous attunement (Scheff 1994) of actions among all categories of people involved is necessary to render the cooperation possible. This process can be analyzed from the perspective of the concept of the articulation work of particular social actors, proposed by Strauss et al. (1985: 151–191). The constant attunement between *the boss* and the female workers, as well as in the group of coworkers, is adopted in case of attendance, the working conditions, standards and *metanorms*. To carry out interactions *in the room* and *in the lounge* smoothly, there is a need to adjust the lines of work adopted by the clients, female workers, *the boss* and the security workers. A woman who provides sex services in the agency does not work only *in*

the room with a client. She needs to perform *in the lounge* to get a client. The quality of this performance is governed by the involvement of all the workers, who are playing on the same team (Goffman 2000). Cooperation in this scope allows them to increase individual profits as well as the *reputation* and income of the venue. Therefore, although each female worker strives for individual benefits, she needs to consider the other actors and cooperate with them to achieve the profits. The women who work together may compete in various dimensions, but it does not exclude the possibility for cooperation to maximize the financial results.

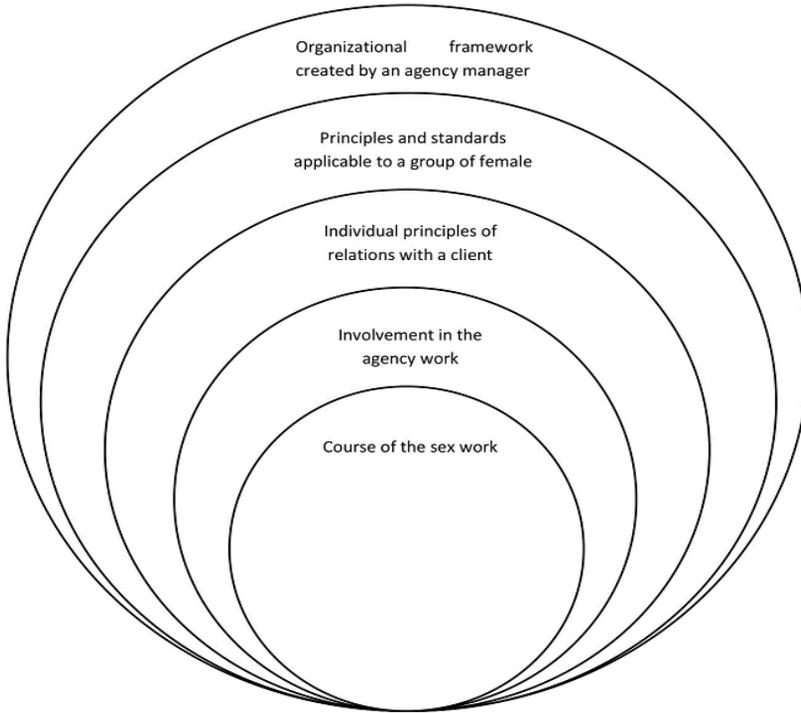


Figure 3. *Work situation* of women providing sexual services in escort agencies

Source: own works

The results of my research allow me to conclude that the world of escort agencies is characterized by a high degree of differentiation. The existence of several styles of venue management and the dynamics of relationships among workers means that the working conditions in the agencies tend to be extremely different. As a result, some women provide sex services in relatively safe conditions that they can control to a certain degree. Other female workers may experience violence and do not have any influence on the conditions of their work. Thus, the course and consequences of being involved in indoor prostitution may be ex-

tremely different for various women – from being objectified and depersonalized to the feeling of agency and satisfaction from directing their own lives.

A similar differentiation can be observed in the sphere of interactions with clients. They are performed according to various *scenarios*, and the female workers adopt different strategies to obtain and maintain control during the interaction *in the room*. Analysis of the collected data shows that, first of all, the female workers do not need to be passive in when dealing with a client. Quite the reverse, they can exert an active influence on the course of the meeting. However, other elements of the *work situation* must support their subjectivity and agency for this to happen. Secondly, the female workers perform a form of emotional labor (Hochschild 2009). It might even be the main aspect of their relations with a client (O’Neill 2001: 89 after Sanders 2005b: 331). In this dimension, work with clients of escort agencies requires similar techniques to those of other sex work (e.g. stripteasers; Pasko 2002) but also to professions from the service sector. The female worker’s readiness to undertake *safety work* is also influenced by how she perceives herself and her position both in the venue and in society. The weaker the position (e.g. in venues with *the oppressive management style*, but also regarding the experienced social stigma and lack of faith in support from, e.g., the police), the lower the probability that a female worker will try to negotiate more subjective relations with a client. Therefore, this is the social odium related to prostitution that, to a great extent, results in the people involved in this profession being the weaker partners in the interactions with clients (cf. Brewis, Linstead 2002).

While considering how escort agencies are organized, some characteristic elements that are also present nowadays may be identified in the ancient lupanars (Robert 1997). However, as a result of the development of the sex services sector, their need to specialize and compete, there are new trends that can be observed, in response to the changing needs of the clients. The larger the club, the more visible the changes in its operation. These are related to introducing a managerial discourse and solutions borrowed from business organizations. My research suggests that many agencies find themselves in an interesting moment, between the traditional manner of operation, as an institution of the “criminal underworld”, and running an official business enterprise from the of entertainment or services sector. There are also some difficulties in finding and keeping female workers who would agree to work in the agency according to principles determined by *the boss*. It was an important goal for my interviewees (also when developing relations with the other workers of the agency and clients) to achieve a greater influence on the pace, working conditions, and their earnings. Numerous studies carried out in other countries also suggest that people who provide sex services in a manner that allows them to control their working conditions are more satisfied and better compensated than those who work for third parties (Weitzer 2013: 715). This may partially explain the increasing difficulties in bringing together a team of female workers, since numerous women who started out in an escort agency eventually

try their hand at individual work. However, a disadvantage of such a solution is the greater risk of victimization when compared to the situation of women who work in the presence of other people (Weitzer 2013: 715). Hence, it will be important for the future of escort agencies (and the shape of the whole market) to offer such interesting working conditions that it would encourage and retain the female workers who have an increasingly broader choice of organizational form in which they can provide sex services.

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ANNEX. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE INTERVIEWEES

Symbol	Sex	Age	Education	Previous paid employment	Work experience in sex work (including escort agencies)*	Location of the escort agencies
R1	F	28	Secondary	Secretary	6 years	Lodz
R2	F	22	Secondary	Saleswoman	3 months	Lodz
R3	F	30	Vocational	Only sex work	9 years	Lodz
R4	F	24	Student	Odd jobs	1 year	Lodz
R5	F	32	Secondary	Saleswoman	19 months	Lodz
R6	F	22	Vocational	Hairdresser	3 years	Lodz
R7	F	28	Primary	Seasonal work	12 years	Lodz, Lublin, several cities in Silesia, Czech Republic and Germany
R8	F	32	Primary	No data	10 years	Lodz
R9	F	40	Secondary	Her own business	3 years	Lodz
R10	F	39	Vocational	Sewerage	3 years	Lodz
R11	F	26	No data	Odd jobs	4 years	Lodz
R12	F	23	Secondary	Odd jobs	2 years	Lodz
R13	F	21	Vocational (cook)	Factory worker	2 years	Lodz
R14	F	24	Secondary	Saleswoman	At least 4 years	Lodz, Warsaw, Tricity, Wroclaw, London, several cities in Germany

Symbol	Sex	Age	Education	Previous paid employment	Work experience in sex work (including escort agencies)*	Location of the escort agencies
R15	F	29	No data	Her own business	About 4 years	Lodz
R16	F	28	Secondary	Odd jobs	3 years	Lodz
R17	F	40	Vocational	Factory worker	3 years	Lodz
R18	F	22	Secondary	Odd jobs, Seasonal work	18 months	Lodz
R19	F	22	No data	Waitress	4 months	Lodz
R20	F	38	She is in a secondary school for adults	Only sex work	10 years	Lodz, Szczecin, London, several cities in Germany and in the Netherlands
R21	F	30	Secondary (nurse)	No data	5 years	Lodz, Warsaw, Katowice
R22	F	49	Secondary	No data	5 months	Lodz
R23	F	30	Secondary	Odd jobs	4 years	Lodz, Warsaw, Poznan
R24	F	56	Primary	Cleaner, cashier	2 years	Lodz
R25	F	35	No data	Odd jobs	3 years	Lodz
R26	F	50	Secondary	Nurse	6 months	Lodz
R27	F	45	No data	Odd jobs	12 years	Lodz
R28	F	41	No data	Saleswoman, factory worker	2 years	Lodz
R29	F	35	Secondary	Part-time job in a bank	3 years	Lodz, several cities in Germany

Symbol	Sex	Age	Education	Previous paid employment	Work experience in sex work (including escort agencies)*	Location of the escort agencies
R30	F	44	No data	Saleswoman, cashier	about 1 year	Lodz
R31	F	43	No data	No data	3 months	Lodz
R32	F	35	No data	No data	No data	Lodz
R33	F	23	Student	No data	About 4 years	Lodz
R34	F	35	No data	No data	1 year	Lodz
R35	F	25	Secondary	Odd jobs	2 years	Lodz
R36	F	31	Secondary	Only sex work	5 months	Lodz
R37	F	25	Secondary	No data	3 months	Lodz
R38	F	33	No data	Only sex work	2 years	Lodz
R39	F	40	Primary	No data	About 20 years	Lodz
R40	F	40	No data	No data	About 4 years	Lodz
R41	F	30	Vocational	Saleswoman	No data	Lodz
R42	F	34	Vocational	Cleaning lady, carer for elderly people	6 years	Lodz
R43	F	35	Secondary	No data	6 years	Lodz, several cities in Germany
R44	F	36	Vocational	Odd jobs	2 years	Lodz
R45	F	43	Vocational	Female bartender	10 years	Lodz, Krakow
R46	F		No data	No data	3 years	Lodz
R47	F	40	Secondary	Ticket inspector on public transport	3 years	Lodz

Symbol	Sex	Age	Education	Previous paid employment	Work experience in sex work (including escort agencies)*	Location of the escort agencies
R48	F		Vocational (gardener)	Female bartender, waitress	One week	Lodz
R49	F	30	No data	Odd jobs	17 months	Lodz, several cities in Germany, Portugal and the United Kingdom
R50	F	38	No data	Odd jobs	5 years	Lodz, Czestochowa
R51	F	32	No data	Female bartender	2 years	Lodz
R52	F	35	No data	Saleswoman	9 years	Lodz
R53	F	No data	No data	No data	2 years	Lodz
R54	F	40	No data	No data	1 year	Lodz
R55	F	34	No data	No data	3 years	Lodz
R56	F	31	No data	Odd jobs	14 years	Lodz

W1	M	60	Higher	The owner of an escort agency	20 years	Lodz
W2	M	45	Higher	A partner in an escort agency	4 years	Lodz
W3	M	25	Higher	A partner in an escort agency	6 months	Lodz
W4	F	32	Secondary	The manager of <i>the apartment</i>	2 years	Upper Silesia
W5	M	42	No data	The manager of the escort agency	No data	Warsaw
W6	F	40	No data	The manager of <i>the apartment</i>	1 year	Warsaw

O1	M	50	Vocational	Security guard and bartender in the escort agency	2 years	Lodz
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Symbol	Sex	Age	Education	Previous paid employment	Work experience in sex work (including escort agencies)*	Location of the escort agencies
O2	M	55	Vocational	Security guard and bartender in the escort agency	7 years	Lodz
O3	M	35	Secondary	Security guard in the escort agency, taxi driver cooperating with agencies	4 years	Lodz
O4	M	45	Secondary	Security guard in the escort agency	9 years	Lodz
O5	M	50	Vocational	Security guard in the escort agency	4 months	Lodz
O6	M	47	Vocational	Security guard in the escort agency	2 months	Lodz
O7	M	38	Vocational	Security guard in the escort agency	1 year	Lodz

Lodz

S1	F	60	Primary	Cleaner in the escort agency	4 years	Lodz
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C1	M	24	Student	Client	2 years	
C2	M	23	Student	Client	1 time	
C3	M	32	Secondary	Client	4 years	
C4	M	48	Vocational	Client	6 years	
C5	M	50	Vocational	Client	2 years	
C6	M	55	Secondary	Client	Irregularly for 5 years	
C7	M	37	Higher	Client	Irregularly for 10 years	

* This information covers all venues that a interviewees worked in from the beginning of her involvement in prostitution to the time of the interview. Therefore, it goes beyond the research period.

Source: own work.

REVIEWER

Elżbieta Zakrzewska-Manterys

INITIATING EDITOR

Iwona Gos

NATIVE SPEACER

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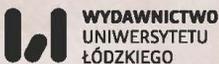
First Edition. W.08362.17.0.M

Publisher's sheets 16.6; printing sheets 15.75

Izabela Ślęzak, PhD, Assistant Professor in the Institute of Sociology of the University of Lodz. Her research interests lie in qualitative methods of social research, symbolic interactionism, sociology of work and organization, sociology of sex work. The author of the book *The work of female sex workers in escort agencies* (in Polish, 2016), which won the 2017 EGOS Book Award from the European Group for Organizational Studies (EGOS) for the best book in the field of organization studies. For this book, in 2016, she also received the Annual Award of the Section of Social Anthropology, Polish Sociological Association for the Best Research in Anthropology of the Year 2017.

The book presents the social organization of escort agencies in Poland. The author focuses on analyzing the actions of female sex workers who are seen as active entities co-creating their working conditions. The author discusses the relationships between employees of the premises, namely the women providing sex services, the managers of the agencies and the security workers. Furthermore, she analyses the interactions between sex workers and their clients.

The book is addressed to people who are interested in qualitative sociology, and those who would like to understand contemporary escort agencies in Poland. It will be also interesting for employees of organizations which work with people who provide sex services.



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ISBN 978-83-8142-096-9

The book is also available
as an e-book

