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Male Refugees & Prostitution in Germany:  
Applying Bourdieu's Theory of The Forms of Capital on Sex  
Work to Analyze Refugees' Integration in German Society

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## Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	II
Abbreviations and Disambiguation.....	IV
Declaration of Authenticity.....	V
Introduction.....	1
Relevance and Reason for my Research.....	2
Problem Statement.....	3
Research Hypothesis.....	5
Research Questions.....	6
Research Design.....	6
Geographical Frame.....	7
Time Frame and Course of Action.....	7
Methods and Procedures.....	8
Ethical Issues.....	9
Literature Review.....	11
Bourdieu's Theories.....	11
Economic Capital.....	12
Cultural Capital.....	12
Embodied Cultural Capital.....	13
Objectified Cultural Capital.....	13
Symbolic Cultural Capital.....	13
Social Capital.....	13
Transformation of Capital.....	14
Accessibility of Sex Work in Today's Times: New Conveniences.....	14
Sex Work and the Exotic Other.....	15
Measuring Integration.....	16
Male Prostitutes in Germany.....	17
Refugees in the German Labor Market.....	18
Defining and Understanding.....	19
Integration.....	19
Sex Work.....	21

The Interviews.....	21
Results.....	23
Age.....	23
Sexual Orientation.....	23
Nationality.....	23
Occupation.....	24
Living and Housing Situation.....	24
Experiences with Sex Work.....	24
Motivations for Doing Sex Work.....	25
Ways of Finding Clients.....	27
Relationships to Clients.....	28
Positive Experiences regarding Sex Work.....	29
Negative Experiences regarding Sex Work.....	31
Economic Capital: Financial Situation.....	32
Cultural Capital: Embodied Capital.....	32
Cultural Capital: Objectified Capital.....	34
Cultural Capital: Symbolic Capital.....	35
Social Capital: Social Circle.....	36
Social Capital: Free Time Activities.....	37
Experiences with German Society and Othering.....	38
Critical Discussion.....	39
Conclusion: Estimating Integration.....	46
List of References.....	50
Appendix.....	54

## Abbreviations and Disambiguation

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IP: Interview-Partner

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LGBT-Community: The Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Community

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MRSW: Male Refugee Sex Worker

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Scene: A group of people that share common interests, for example the gay scene which consists of males that share the attribute of same sex attraction and may socialize in specific areas

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Sex Worker: Someone that earns money through sex work; either by having sex with other people in exchange for money, or by offering other services, such as selling their personal belongings, like underwear, to others.

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Male Refugees & Prostitution in Germany:  
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Analyze Refugees' Integration in German Society

To trace how many male sex workers are active in Germany is almost an impossible task. According to the Kriseninterventionsstelle für Stricher [Crisis Intervention Center for Hustlers] (as cited in Bückmann & Schaible, 2017), there are about 600 - 800 male sex workers in Frankfurt alone, from which around 90 % have a migration background. The ratio of migrant men has drastically increased in the past few years, especially due to the humanitarian crisis that led to several million asylum seekers entering Germany (Juran & Broer, 2017). Many of these migrant men are fleeing their home countries and are putting up with precarious situations, dealing with poverty and hopelessness. In my research I want to examine how MRSW in Germany are using sex work in what ways to improve their abilities to integrate into society.

To understand how MRSW are profiting off of sex work it is important to understand why sex work is such a prominent option for young refugee men in the first place. Therefore it is crucial to look at the German legislature, and other factors, such as the rising importance of social media, to pinpoint certain preconditions that perhaps encourage young men to do sex work.

The main focus of this study is Bourdieu's theory of the three forms of capital (social, economic and cultural), in order to explain how and to which extent this group of people can profit from sex work. In my opinion, this theory is the perfect lens through which sex work can be analyzed, because sex work does not only serve the purpose of earning money, it also enables community-building, the possible development of skills and agency and, contrary to the belief that MRSW are automatically victims, may actually be used for long-term integration and life improvement.

It is important to analyze the motives for these young men to get involved in sex work to understand how pay off is generated. One of the key factors is the accessibility of sex work in recent times. As pointed out by Brennan (2017) the access to sex work has changed drastically over the past decade. The process of contacting clients or sex workers has shifted from bars, parks, and cinemas, to online platforms and apps. This growing convenience definitely impacts the likelihood of coming into contact with sex work, and may also alter the experiences in different ways, as using online portals or apps is not likely to result in the same community building as working in special districts or bars does.

Furthermore, taking a look at how these young men identify themselves can be crucial. There is a difference between a homosexual man seeking sexual partners for pleasure and earning something on the side, or a heterosexual man meeting up with other men out of existential angst and the desperate need to get money in any way. All these factors heavily influence the way sex work is experienced and how it advances someone.

### **Relevance and Reason for my Research**

The reason for conducting this research is also the reason why I consider it to be highly relevant. Research on male sex workers is already less prominent than that on female sex workers, but male refugees are almost completely neglected as their own field of study (Ellison & Weitzer, 2017). Also, relations between sex workers and interactions in the community itself are not researched on sufficiently (Schönnagel, 2016). For the research review, it was not possible to find already examined data on this precise topic or research on the core group of MRSW and their experiences. Fortunately, I was able to find two important studies on sex worker in Germany and thus be able to get an idea how research on this topic is approached in Germany and in return, get inspired

for my thesis. These two studies were conducted by Wright (2001), and Steffan and Körner (2016), who specifically focused on the life situations of male sex workers in North Rhine-Westphalia. While this research gap definitely poses some challenges, it also allows this research to be more creative in regard to how the theoretical framework is set: building the theoretical framework with other relevant aspects such as theories on capital, the accessibility of sex work, and male sex workers in general, it then becomes apparent to compare the findings to the data obtained from the interviews.

It is important to look at how the topic has been researched already. As Bimbi (2007) concludes, studies on male sex workers oftentimes have dehumanized the men researched on to be socially deviant, by strengthening stereotypes and paradigms. This is exactly why I formulated my research questions the way I did: focusing on the profits generated through sex work is not to trivialize the hardship and emotional struggle that comes with sex work – on the contrary, I am able to share experiences and ideas that are not only shaped by misfortune, but also by agency and intelligence on how to deal with difficult situations.

Furthermore, it also sets limits to my research, as anything other than analyzing social phenomena would exceed the limits of this thesis. Nonetheless, it is also aim of this research to give the interview partners the opportunity to share their stories, and by doing so, advocate for raising awareness about how real the threat of poverty and the loss of alternatives are to so many young men, especially those with a migration background.

### **Problem Statement**

I am aware that my aspirations with this research are high and that there are many challenges I am going to face before and while I am writing this thesis. Dennis (2008) states that only one-tenth of 166 academic journals put

focus on male sex workers. With the focus on Germany, most research is on female sex workers or sex workers in general, in which it becomes apparent that a large chunk of male sex workers are from Eastern Europe (Ellison & Weitzer, 2017), or generally the bodily and mental health condition – which is really not suited for this type of research.

The biggest challenge clearly poses the finding of MRSW that are willing to do an interview with me. Sex work is a highly sensitive topic for these young men. Caution, professionalism and certain awareness are indispensable for me in order to find these men and gain their interest and trust in me. Especially, as I am doing this research whilst the on-going public health crisis of Covid-19 is making it close to impossible to travel around Germany and meeting willing interview partners for personal interviews.

Additionally to this, it was made clear by institutions for male sex workers that recruiting hustlers for interviews is only possible when going into the field and trying to get into contact with them at the places they usually reside, such as certain parks and especially special bars for sex workers in Cologne – all of which are, understandably, closed now. Fortunately, the impact of social media has drastically changed sex work, which suggests finding MRSWs on various websites and dating apps.

However, for this research the experiences of refugees working bars or other public spaces can be important, in order to be able to paint an encompassing picture of the state of MRSW. While, in qualitative research it is not the aim to be able to make generalizing statements or to come to general conclusions, the sampling of MRSW I can find for this research is deliberately kept broad, as a focus on online-based sex workers may not be sufficient to draw conclusions.



## **Research Hypothesis**

The research hypothesis is that men with refugee background, due to several circumstances, get involved in sex work and use such practice to achieve upward social movement and thereby enable better integration into society, for example by bonding with peers with same experiences or using the different forms of capital earned. Bourdieu's theory of the forms of capital concludes that capital is able to transfer and transform into other forms of capital, greater pay off is thus generated.

In this research it is important to analyze how sex work impacts the following: *Economic Capital*, by analyzing the monetary means MRSW earn through sex work ; *Embodied Cultural Capital*, by looking at the certain knowledge gathered on how to behave, move or articulate in society ; *Objectified Cultural Capital*, by looking at the things MRSW spend their earned money on, such as clothes ; *Symbolic Cultural Capital*, by analyzing whether MRSW have plans in regard to future jobs or education, enabled by sex work ; *Social Capital*, by examining how the social field and network of MRSW has changed through sex work.

Determining whether someone is integrated into society or not is a difficult task to do, as there are no objective measures as to what successful integration looks like. It is my task to analyze the data I collect from my interview partners in regard to how they correspond with literature I found that examines what could be considered successful integration or not.

## **Research Questions**

I believe that I can only succeed to answer my research question when I keep my theoretical frameworks and arguments encompassing several factors in order not to neglect important details. As the theory on the forms of capital by Bourdieu is about social movement it becomes obvious to build a bridge to

integration, which is something of interest for many refugee men.

By analyzing the practices of my interview partners through the dimensions of profit or loss the following sub-questions arise to help answer my research question:

How are MRSW using sex work to integrate themselves into German society?

1. Which profit is generated due to sex work?
2. How are these profits transformed?
3. How does this enable integration?

### **Research Design**

Researching on MRSW and doing qualitative interviews poses several challenges to me as a researcher. The target group are male sex workers with refugee background, which is a very heterogeneous group because the levels of education, skills and also cultural background vary a lot.

The common denominator that is found among most sex workers with migration background is financial instability. Because of the structure of my bachelor thesis and the current on-going public health crisis Covid-19 I need to adjust my way of going into the field to measures that are appropriate, especially to not expose my interview partners to any health risks due to this research.

The focus of my research on sex work in general is intentional. To distinguish between call boys and hustlers would only limit the pool of willing interviewees even more, and solely researching on either one would lead to one-sided results. Call boys are more likely to be from higher class backgrounds compared to hustlers (Wright, 2001, Steffan & Körner, 2016), meaning that less privileged voices of hustlers could be ignored. Additionally, this would not be sufficient to answer my research question in regard to MRSW in Germany in general, as street workers and rent boys do show differences in their level of

security, income and social standing.

### **Geographical Frame**

During the preparation of this thesis I got in touch with several German institutions that are active in the field of aiding refugees and sex workers in Germany. It was made clear to me that, while they understandably cannot forward any contacts of MRSW to me directly, it is impossible for me not to go into the field and seek face-to-face confrontations. I was given information on several hot spots, such as parks and public spaces, in all of Germany where refugee men frequently spend their time to seek other men. Additionally to this, I was given the data of gay bars within North Rhine-Westphalia which are known for being a safe space for MRSW to spend their times to socialize, share their experiences with each other and to be in a comfortable and convenient surrounding. The points of interest for me in this research will be Cologne which seems to have a high density of MRSW compared to other German cities. Local restrictions of density do not play such a prominent role in my online research on special websites and apps, this may allow me to find MRSW in less populated places and those that are not acquainted with LGBT and sex work spaces like bars.

### **Time Frame and Course of Action**

Before conducting interviews and analyzing the results, a theoretical background for this paper has to be set, not only to be able to design the interview guide but also to properly understand the issues and problems I may face during my research. I was able to get into contact with several people that know of MRSW in their circle of social contacts that were able to forward my contact data to them. Due to Covid-19 I conduct telephone interviews, which I also expect to be the most comfortable for my interview partners. All interviews

were conducted in German from late May to late July 2020.

### **Methods and Procedures**

Part of my research is the analysis of existing literature and research on male prostitution in Germany, integration and capital. A qualitative in-depth interview guideline was designed for this research, in order to obtain data from the interview partners and compare these findings to the research I found. This way I obtain detailed information on experiences and behavior (Boyce & Neale, 2006), in order to understand, describe and explain social phenomena (Flick, 2007). I decided on doing semi-structured interviews with a set framework of open-ended questions that allow the participants to get inspired to share all the information they feel comfortable with. Obviously, as the interviewer, I intervene very clearly into the privacy of my interviewees I need to be able to recognize reluctance and discomfort and adjust my interviewing style.

For the sampling of my research I follow the idea of deductive sampling (Reinders, 2005). This procedure of finding appropriate interview partners presupposes that I, as the researcher, am already aware of the literature and directions I want to examine in my research. Consequently, I chose my interview partners in accordance to their connection to the themes I am familiar with. For my qualitative research there are several socio-ecological key factors the interview partners need to be in accordance with: Their male sex, their activity in sex work and their shared background of refugee biography.

In order to analyze the findings qualitative content analysis was chosen. The deductive category application is the given technique here – as I already divided the interview guideline into the different aspects I want to examine (relating to economic, cultural, social capital, et cetera) – which allows an efficient handling of the data. This way I can work with quotes during the

analysis in the discussion and ascribe them to their respective relevant categories. Mayring and Fenzl (2014) conceptualizes deductive category application in qualitative research as an apriori method of building a framework and analyzing the data in accordance to what is assumed to be studied. This compliments Reinders (2005) idea of deductive sampling in several ways as my research aims are clearly pronounced beforehand.

There are several areas in which MRSW frequent both in bars but also online. For this research an interview guideline was designed which is suited for both hustlers and call boys (online-based). For this an internet profile was set up, in a way that MRSW will have the chance to approach me on their own wish. Similar to this I will frequent public bars for sex workers.

### **Ethical Issues**

When conducting in-depth interviews with this specific group of people there are definitely urgent ethical issues. Flick (2007) pronounces that the way questions are formulated is very important. To convey sensitivity and certain openness with my questions is a priority, at no time my interview partners should feel like they are being pressured to answer or that they are being pressured to give detail on something they do not wish to. Appropriate questions and an appropriate interviewing style can result in a trustworthy environment which enables the interview partner to freely express themselves. As I may touch on traumatic experiences, the participants may experience the interviews to be therapeutic, which encourages them to share all the information they wish to (Mealer & Jones, 2014).

As the majority of the interviews are telephone-based it gives the interviewees the comfort of their own space, but it also makes it difficult for me as the researcher to recognize and analyze body language and possible discomfort. Mealer and Jones (2014) elaborate how qualitative telephone

interviews differ from qualitative interviews where both participants are physically present. As it is not possible to observe the interviewees controlling their personal space (distancing themselves from the interviewer, for example), and their gestures and bodily expressions, the focus needs to be put on linguistics. Paralinguistic communication (the speed and volume of the voice) and the use of time (is discomfort signaled by a delay in speech?) are the important factors to recognize and analyze. It is thus crucial that both the interviewer and the interviewee chose spaces where they can talk freely and without disturbances.

Discretion is another important factor as the interviews will be anonymous, meaning that I do not want to obtain the names and too personal information that could identify my partners. As discussed with my supervising professor I do not audio record my interviews and instead take notes which I immediately write into a coherent text after the interview. I am aware that some of my interview partners never have talked to someone about these issues and that it is important that I police my language in a way that the situation feels comfortable and trust-worthy, because I can only gather real experiences when the interview partner feels like they can be honest.

As sexuality labels are self-described I will need to pay attention to the words used by me and by the interviewee, because homosexuality is understood differently in different parts of the world (Morgan, 2014) and thus can be rejected as a label by my interview partners, even if it technically describes the reality. Morgan (2014) proposes the idea to differentiate between sexual identity and sexual orientation. In this paper it thus becomes apparent to not expect my interviewees do explicitly state that their sexual identity is homosexual or heterosexual, but whether they voice content with sexual activity with another man, or not. The sexual orientation of the individual can be crucial to analyze to which extent the involvement in sex work (sex with other men) is voluntarily or

out of urgency. I am aware that the information I contain may be contradictory to a certain extent, especially when it comes to my interview partners being put in a situation where they may or may not have to label themselves.

Furthermore, I want to refrain from using the words sex work and prostitution as much as they may trigger some of my interview partners or make them feel uncomfortable, as not everyone sees their activity as work or themselves to be prostitutes.

## **Literature Review**

### **Bourdieu's Theories**

To analyze how refugee men navigate through their lives and social groups within society I found Bourdieu's theory of The Forms of Capital (1986) to be of high importance. He argues that it is not sufficient to look at how much monetary wealth a person possesses to analyze how they succeed in society, but that it actually is the interplay of three different forms of capital that make social climbing possible.

According to Bourdieu, capital is the result of labor, and especially in the context of male refugees conducting sex work it becomes interesting how this kind of labor affects not only the economic capital of these people belonging to a marginalized socioeconomic group, but also social and cultural capitals. The question arises whether sex work is not only paid sex with strangers but that it is an act that can be used for socialization and upward movement within society.

Furthermore, Bourdieu (1986) argues that:

Capital, which, in its objectified or embodied forms, takes time to accumulate and which, as a potential capacity to produce profits and to reproduce itself in identical or expanded form, contains a tendency to persist in its being, is a force inscribed in the objectivity of things so that everything is not equally possible or impossible. (p. 241)

Which suggests that generating profit or profitability itself are a crucial component of every behavior and social action. He furthermore explains this by differentiating between three forms of capital – economic, cultural, social – and suggests that capital, whether it is materialized (an object you possess) or personified (expression of taste), is subject to certain fluidity. As profit is generated as a consequence of action it can be instrumentalized to further maximize pay off or achieve different results completely.

**Economic capital.** Referring to the wealth and other assets of an individual that can be transformed into monetary means. According to Bourdieu (1986) it is “the most material type of capital” (p. 242), and can be reshaped into the other forms of capital, namely cultural and social capital, which are mostly immaterial. Economic capital can be either transformed into money or more institutionalized assets such as property rights, generally speaking.

**Cultural capital.** As it is further differentiated into three other sub-categories, entails (1) *embodied capital* which can be in the forms of language, accent, mannerism, style, expression and taste, (2) *objectified capital* which focuses on individuals physical belongings, clothing and style with cultural significance, and (3) *symbolic capital* that can be analyzed in the form of qualifications.



***Embodied cultural capital.*** Referring to the language, accent and mannerism of an individual, that may differentiate or resemble them from another social group. Voice plays a significant role here, because it is a big means of communication and is used differently with languages and especially accents. An example for this would be broken English that may differentiate a native speaker from a non-native speaker or foreigner; or posh accents that may differentiate lower class speaking styles from upper class speaking styles. Mannerism encompasses how someone behaves and moves with their body and what kind of message they send. Mannerism is not only gendered generally speaking but also heavily influenced by class and social status.

***Objectified cultural capital.*** Referring to physical belonging, clothing and style objectified capital puts the focus on commodities with cultural significance. Especially clothing has the power to give away a lot of information on someone's education, class background or social status. Different styles of clothing and expression do carry different meanings and are used for the identification of group belonging or rejection of other social groups.

***Symbolic cultural capital.*** When analyzing the symbolic capital one possesses, qualifications or certificates are taken into consideration. For example, being a professor or working as an artist gives you certain symbolic capital other professions do not. Prestige and expertise are recognized as a form of capital that can be used for social mobility.

***Social capital.*** The social capital of an individual can be measured when looking at the interpersonal relationships individuals share with each other. As Bourdieu (1986) describes it as the “membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital”

(pp. 248-249), he points out the profitability of social circles. Ergo some social circles lead to higher capital and pay off than others and can be analysed in regard how individuals are supported in different areas, for example emotional or financial resources.

**Transformation of Capital.** Capital in all its forms is able to reproduce itself and transform into other forms of capital. This is especially interesting when looking through the lens of marginalized and less privileged groups, like for example refugees, to analyze how capital is used to generate more pay off. As Bourdieu (1986) points out the naturalness of capital it suggests that capital does not need to be transformed consciously at all, on the contrary, the ordinariness of such behavior becomes clear when looking at the example he gives. Giving someone a gift you spent economic capital on leads to a rise in social capital as social relationships are strengthened. Being in circles of a high social capital will result in rising cultural capital as certain ideas how to behave (good manners, for example), speak (no curse words), or to dress are learned. Contributing to the social capital of a group with gifts (economic capital) can be rewarded with symbolic cultural capital, such as admiration. In the end, the transformation of capital becomes a circular tradition of exchange in which transformation occurs continuously– as long as there is pay off.

### **Accessibility of Sex Work in Today's Times: New Conveniences**

Analyzing sex work in recent times only makes sense when taking into account the huge influence social media and technology have had on the development on how people meet. Brennan (2017) argues that dating apps have become an attractive alternative to brothels or agencies because of the anonymity and higher rates that can be charged because the men work independently. The situationality of sex work is coupled with spontaneity, as it

is described how gay men end up doing sex work by using dating apps because they either cannot find a partner for a committed relationship in the first place, and because sex work through social media offers an easy way to earn extra money without having any obligations, as men can freely choose with whom they want to meet and to which rate.

### **Sex Work and the Exotic Other**

In her paper, Hulusjö (2013) details how othering processes conceptualize sex workers as *the prostitute*. Othering is defined to be the conceptualization of smaller groups as the Other by the dominant group in society. It thus functions as a way to construct differences and hierarchies as “ideas about difference acquire meaning and social significance” (Hulusjö, 2013, p. 3). This phenomenon can also be observed with the focus on ethnicity or class, raising the question how othering enables and hinders integration in different contexts.

To elaborate on this, Özbay (2010) conducted a highly interesting study for his paper in 2010, which describes how the conceptualization of sex workers as the other may look in reality. In his research he studied rentboys in Istanbul, putting his focus on their masculinity and expression of identity. The young men he interviewed were from lower-class backgrounds and from rural areas, isolated from the metropolitan Istanbul. Their lower class background is linked to their expression of exaggerated masculinity which functions as a way to distance themselves from the Westernized gay culture in Istanbul.

These sex workers do not identify themselves to be homosexual and purposefully display hyper-masculine behavior: Using their cultural and class background, they attract gay men “who are supposed to have a fantasy of having sex with heterosexual men” (Özbay, 2010, p. 647) by expressing a masculinity defined by physical and unrestrained traits. This display is in contrast with the

masculinity of the homosexual men which is defined by feminine traits and cleanness. Urban men from the metropolitan city thus purposefully seek out men from rural areas for their class-background, which they other as the objects of their desire.

I expect these findings to be analogue to what I will learn from my interview partners. Tackling sexual or dating racism and the fetishization of migrants and people of color is not the focus of this paper at all. However, akin to how Özbay (2010) dealt with these issues in his research I want to recognize identity, expression and even ethnicity and cultural background as assets that influence your market value on the sex market and thus can be used for personal gain. Additionally to this, in order to analyze the processes of integration, it appears crucial to take a look at what kind of impact possible othering or fetishization experiences have on the interviewed MRSW.

### **Measuring Integration**

The Council of Europe (1997) has written a lot about immigrants' integration into European societies. One of the main questions they tried to answer was how to actually measure integration, as there are very different definitions as to what integration means in the first place. The main concern raised is that there is no feasible scale to measure successful or unsuccessful integration.

In order to design a measure, it is important to define indicators of cultural and social integration. Doing so becomes difficult when it is not entirely clear what indicates good or bad cultural integration. Is it really successful integration when an immigrant unlearns all of their cultural heritage to fulfill the cultural expectations of the host society? And, how can cultural integration even be measured, aside from language skills?

Measuring social integration suggests taking a look at "binational friendships,

housing or outer appearance (clothing, hair styles)” (The Council of Europe, p. 12, 1997) of immigrants.

Nonetheless, the evaluation of immigrants' life experiences is oftentimes based on assumptions and speculations, due to the difficulty to collect and evaluate specific data.

Generating a universal tool on how to measure integration is impossible, as the concepts of migration and integration are constantly under change and one assessment of integration would only carry scientific relevance in its own study, with its specified set of frameworks (Harder et al., 2018). For my research, I need to define my own factors that indicate successful or unsuccessful indications, in correspondence to preexisting criteria, such as social and cultural integration as described by the Council of Europe (1997).

### **Male Prostitutes in Germany**

According to Wright (2001) who conducted a study on male sex workers in Germany, defining who is a sex worker can be quite challenging. The commonly used definition is that a sex worker is someone who offers sex in exchange for money in a given period of time – although it is to note that there are many sex workers that have sex in exchange for various goods and not only money.

Furthermore, a distinction between hustlers and call boys can be necessary, as these two categories are frequented by different socioeconomic groups of men. Call boys tend to be more from middle class background, are older and able to self-organize their sex work activity. The working conditions are also very different from hustlers, who mostly work at street districts and public places. Nonetheless, no male prostitute is the same, as there is no typical male prostitute in Germany. They all come from various cultural backgrounds, have diverse sexual identities and nationalities. The common denominator is

financial problems and the lack of alternatives (Wright, 2001).

In order to find out how self-determined male refugees get involved in sex work it is to be examined, whether they have been involved in prostitution in their home countries already, and if the practice naturally evolved from using dating apps or using dating apps is only a means to seek clients. Feminist research on agency comes into play here as Jean (2015) argues that even though female sex workers oftentimes conduct sex work on their own merit, it can be argued that patriarchal structures are constraining the agency and self-determination of these women. Meaning, that women freely choose to prostitute themselves, they oftentimes would not have done so if they had better alternatives

### **Refugees in the German Labor Market**

According to the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (2015) asylum applicants may enter the labor market after 3 months upon arrival in Germany. For this they need to obtain a work permit from their local authorities. Generally, within the first 15 months, refugee workers are objected to the Federal Employment Agency's priority check, which guarantees German and European Union workers to be prioritized over the refugees job application. After four years any restrictions or approval by agencies is obsolete.

Obviously these restrictions and complex mechanisms pose a huge obstacle for many asylum seekers that come to Germany. The bureaucratic nature and language barriers may scare off refugees to aim for legally entering the German labor market, and in return may influence them to get involved in illegal activity to earn money, such as prostitution.

## **Defining and Understanding**

### **Integration**

Harder et al. (2018) define integration as “the degree to which immigrants have the knowledge and capacity to build a successful, fulfilling life in the host society” (p. 2). This definition contains two key points of Bourdieu’s theory of the forms of capital (1986), as knowledge and capacity are pronounced. Knowledge includes the skills obtained by migrants, for example, language, the know-how to dress or articulate in society, the understanding of cultural differences and similarities, et cetera. Capacity on the other hand “refers to mental, social, and economic resources immigrants have to invest in their futures” (Harder et al., 2018, p.2). With mental resources referring to mental health – something out of the realms of this paper – social and economic resources are covered by Bourdieu’s approaches on the economic and social capitals.

Furthermore, Harder et al. (2018) point out that their definition does not appoint for assimilation, in contrast to integration. Rather, it is a tool with which integration is understood as mere acquisition of said knowledge on the host countries culture – and not the shedding of the immigrants cultural heritage. Thus, the information whether MRSW in Germany have profound skills in the German language (integration), does not carry information whether or not they do not speak their mother tongue among other social groups as well (assimilation).

Moreover, the Council of Europe (1997) adds to this by pointing out that the influence of the host country cannot be undermined, as the successful integration of immigrants heavily depends on the attitudes of the society. Meaning that a MRSW that is fluent in the German language, has perfect knowledge on the culture and several qualifications, will not be able to successfully integrate into society as long as the host country is showing hostile

attitudes against immigrants. On the contrary, a hostile society influences how much the migrant is willing to integrate (Harder et al., 2018). As a result, migrants and host society exist separately from another, with minimum social exchange and contained integration.

This is further elaborated by Klarenbeek (2019) who urges for an increasing understanding of integration as a two-way road, in which actions of integrating are not the sole responsibility of the immigrant (outsider), but also of the hosting society (insiders). She defines integration as a process that ideally leads to “a society in which there are no social boundaries between ‘legitimate members’, or insiders, and ‘non-legitimate members’, or outsiders” (Klarenbeek, 2019, p.2). This definition describes integration as a valuable end-all goal in society, and, at the same time presupposes certain conditions that hinder these complex processes of integration. Her definition is influenced by boundary theory, which reads that “social boundaries are social distinctions that people make which constitute their attitudes and behaviour towards others” (Klarenbeek, 2019, p.2). This conceptualization of people that belong to a society and those that do not (us versus them) calls back to processes of othering, in which people are ascribed to different social groups, based on certain traits like refugee status or citizenship, for example. The other component of her definition puts focus on social standing, as there is a observable power imbalance between insiders and outsiders. Insiders tend to have access to economic, cultural, and social capital, compared to outsiders. This oftentimes inherently comes with citizenship, as there are certain privileges that come with citizenship, such as voting rights. On the other hand, this suggests that outsiders have to find ways to access these resources and capitals.

Another aspect which I deem highly relevant in order to understand integration, is covered by Blau (1960). In his research he observes integration through the lens of social attraction. It is argued that individuals that want to



integrate into society, or groups, need to display certain attributes that are deemed attractive and valuable within that group. Processes like these happen almost unconsciously, as individuals observe the interests of groups and instantly display their specific attributes, that might be deemed as valuable.

This is highly relevant for my research, as I am focusing on MRSW which display a complex intersection of different identities, and thus, different possible group belongings. As homosexual men, it may be apparent that the LGBT-community might be the group to integrate into. As Muslim men, the different Muslim communities might be of interest. Especially since Muslim and LGBT-communities can be argued to be minorities in the German society, the question arises, how identification with these groups intersects, and how they influence overall integration into German society.

### **Sex Work**

According to Gusy, Krauss, Schrott, and Heckmann (as cited in Wright, 2001) it is difficult to uniformly define sex work and who is eligible to be considered a sex worker. While every man that has earned money by offering sexual services within the past 12 months can be considered a sex worker, attention needs to be paid to the different life circumstances that can drastically alter experiences. Furthermore, it has to be understood that sex work is also sex work when the worker is not being paid monetarily, but also with other different kinds of material and immaterial possessions, such as food even or values.

### **The Interviews**

For this research two batches of interviews were planned. The first batch with MRSW with whom I built contact over specific online platforms, or by having my contact details handed over to them. Especially in the past few years gay dating sites have changed in favor of sex work: Planetromeo, probably

the biggest online site for homosexual men, has a whole additional platform where men can make profiles with the goal of being contacted for going out and having sex in exchange for money. Interestingly it is possible to search for specifics and filter sex workers according to their interests and also their ethnicity. As I was researching on said platform I noticed that men with different cultural backgrounds from the German or European ones, were very explicit in how they nicknamed themselves and designed their profile descriptions. The idea of racial fetishization instantly came to mind when reading Muslim men describing themselves as “sultans”, “slave masters” and other similar vocabulary. Especially the graphic description of their masculinity and superiority compared to the Western man was prominent in almost all sex profiles, with clear defining of the power dynamics and roles fulfilled by these Arab men – this calls back to Özbays (2010) findings. Ethnicity and cultural background seem to be used as explicit marketing strategy that not only distinguish these men from other sex workers but also make them seem more interesting. Comment sections in which customers – mostly white men, ranging from their 30s to 50s – proved this, as they give feedback on the service and time spent together with highly racialized commentary that borders on racism.

Due to Covid-19 it was not possible for me to go into the field and search for hustlers, for the longest time of this research, as bars were closed, understandably. Fortunately I was able to find one MRSW that was willing to share his story with me and conduct an interview. Unlike the other interviewees, his method of finding partners differed, as he only frequents local bars, and does not use social media.

## **Results**

The different men I interviewed, even though they share similar biographical backgrounds, differ in a lot of ways regarding their current life situations and understandings of what is sex work.

### **Age**

The six interviewed men (IP1 - 6) that engage in call boy activity were aged from 23 to 27. The interviewee (IP7) that works exclusively as a hustler is 37 years old

### **Sexual Orientation**

Sexual orientation was a very difficult topic to touch upon during the interviews. Out of the seven interviewees, five men either described their attraction to men, or stated that they were homosexual by giving themselves that label. For the other two men sexuality did not come up as an identity. One of the interviewees (IP2) describes how he “is not into sleeping with men” and how he rather not “has ties to the gay scene”, because sex work only fulfills the purpose of earning money for him. For IP1 the topic of sexuality did not come up as a point of interest for him to talk about, but he claims to have gotten the idea of doing sex work by being hit on at bars he frequented.

### **Nationality**

All interviewed originally came from Syria, with all of them – with the exceptions of IP2 and IP7 –, sharing their desire to fully integrate into Germany by taking on the German citizenship in the long-term. For IP2 Germany is a stopover to earn money and live a safe life until he feels like returning to a Middle Eastern country. IP7 plans on going back to Syria, as he remains hopeful that one day the Assad regime will come to an end and a secure life is made

possible again. Currently it is not safe for him, because he worked as a journalist before and the authorities would immediately arrest him.

### **Occupation**

The occupation and levels of education were very diverse within the pool of interviewed men, which also represent the group of male refugees generally. While both IP2 and IP4 are currently looking for employment, IP3 is working at a supermarket, IP5 is working in a theater and IP1 is doing an apprenticeship as a carpenter, IP6 is working several temporary mini-jobs – official and private avocations like working for friends, helping in a supermarket, and teaching German to Arab speakers – to finance his study. IP7 is currently employed in a hospital, but he plans on picking up his study again, which he started in Syria.

### **Living and Housing Situation**

Five out of the seven interviewed men lived in shared flats. IP1, IP4 and IP7 live with other refugees or friends. IP3 shares his apartment with two friends that also do sex work. IP2 and IP5 have their apartment for their own, and IP6 lives together with other students.

### **Experiences with Sex Work**

The way commercial sex was approached differed greatly between the interviewed men, with occupational meetings ranging from a small to a huge amount of different clients, to the business model of selling underwear. Nonetheless, how sex work was understood to fit into the lives of the interviewed men shared certain similarities: All of them did not consider themselves as prostitutes or sex workers per se, and oftentimes made clear that it is not their occupation. It was crucial for me to explain why I use the term sex

work in relation to them, if they felt comfortable with that in the first place. It was agreed on that I use the term for simplicity purposes, and because many of them did not think of labeling these activities or thinking of themselves as sex workers beforehand. While, regarding to the impact of sex work, the interviewees differed in many ways: What is the money used for? How is the situation dealt with? How are the experiences (negative/positive)? – it did become evident that the common denominators are financial angst as the main motivation, and social media and the accessibility of sex work as the enabler.

IP7 is the only sex worker I was able to locate in a gay bar in Cologne. Unlike the other interviewed men he does not look for clients on dating apps and instead prefers to find men in the real world and see if the chemistry is there.

### **Motivations for Doing Sex Work**

The motivations of doing sex work were diverse. While financial angst was the main motivation for most of the interviewees, the desire to not feel isolated and alone, and the desire to feel independent and have agency over the financial situation, also played relevant parts. IP1 describes how he was influenced by stranger men complimenting and flirting with him in bars and on the streets, and that these advances gave him the idea of sexual favors being a reliable way of earning money, as he describes his life situation back then as precarious. While he only participated in commercial sex during his first year of being here, he states to have met 50 - 80 men and stopped when he started his apprenticeship.

IP2 says that he had already been meeting men in exchange for money before he came to Germany. Sex work became some kind of habit for him with the sole purpose of earning quick money and be able to save money to improve his life situation and support his family. Interestingly, he does not consider sex

with men as a pleasant experience for him.

IP3 started having sex with stranger men regularly about one and a half years after coming to Germany. He started meeting men in exchange for money when he began using dating apps and noticed the amount of possibilities of earning money that way. His motivations were achieving financial stability and the desire to not feel alone. Now, after having a strong social circle he occasionally conducts commercial sex, but only “if the offer is good”. As he describes it, he did not commence in sex work out of desperation, but that it evolved by using dating platforms, getting to know people, and wanting to better his financial situation.

For IP4 commercial sex was mainly motivated by financial angst and not being able to find proper work. Being responsible for himself is very important and sex work is one of the easiest ways for him to influence his life situation. Commencing in sex work started in gay bars, where men bought him drinks and invited him over. He describes how he did not feel comfortable telling men to pay him for sexual advances explicitly, but that men would already expect such activities with refugee men, as prostitution of migrant men is common in these bars. Even though he enjoys the personal contact with men, he prefers online platforms, because there he is able to not respond if he wishes to and feels more confident setting prices.

IP5 met men for money as he started using dating apps and saw the financial potential it gave him. While he did not suffer financially, as he was living with his parents, it helped him with extra money he used for his free time activities. Unlike the other interviewed he has the experience of meeting one man for a longer period of time, who paid him for spending time with him, additionally to occasional sex.

IP6 recalls having met 20 - 25 men in exchange for money. Besides his small jobs he earns his money by selling his underwear and worn clothes to

people that contact him online. As the main motivation he points out that on dating platforms, men are very desperate and would pay up high amounts of money for items like underwear, that it “would be idiotic not to take the offer”. Whenever there is an urgent need for money, selling his underwear or meeting men when they are willing to pay enough, is always an option he wants to rely on.

For IP7 sex work was a way to achieve financial stability and take responsibility for himself. Similarly to IP4, he got the idea by getting advanced on by gay men in bars. Especially as his first year of staying here was a hardship for him financially and emotionally, he considered it as the quickest way to help him out of his life situation.

### **Ways of Finding Clients**

There seems to be three techniques how the interviewed found their clients. The first, found their clients in gay bars (IP7). The second group found their clients exclusively by browsing online platforms and building contact there (IP2, IP3, IP5, IP6). And the third group found partners both in bars and online platforms (IP1 & IP4), but it has to be pointed out that dating sites are still the predominantly used way of getting into contact for various reasons.

The interviewed men describe how online platforms are safer than real-life encounters, and that the possibility of not replying to a message or simply not showing up when there is a feeling of skepticism helps a lot with keeping off the pressure. Especially in the past few years a lot has changed on online platforms and how sex work can be approached online. The interviewed men operate profiles on Hunqz, a website connected to PlanetRomeo, which is explicitly used for offering and finding escort and sex services with men within a specific distance. Besides this platform the interview partners also say to be using Grindr, which is an dating and sex app, which shows all other Grindr

profiles in your immediate surrounding. While advertising sexual services in return for money is actually prohibited and will lead to the detention of the profile, men use abbreviations like “TG?” (Taschengeld, pocket money) and emojis to signify their interest in giving or receiving sexual services for money. IP2 elaborates that Grindr is the easiest and quickest way to find clients because the app shows you how far – sometimes just meters – someone is away from you. Online platforms are not only convenient in regard to how easy it can be to find a client or partner, IP4 draws attention to the opportunity to appear more confident online. According to him, having contact over the internet makes him feel more comfortable with setting prices and also boundaries on what he feels comfortable doing, as “it can be hard to explicitly say no” when you are facing someone who could always decide to not pay you or even assault you.

IP1, IP4 and IP7 find their clients and partners also in real encounters, in bars and clubs. For IP7 finding partners this way is attractive for him for various reasons: real encounters show if there is chemistry and sympathy, they help you with analyzing whether a partner or client is genuinely interested, and, most importantly, it is accompanied with positive nightlife experiences with friends. According to him, clients will talk to him in these bars, get him a drink and then ask him to leave with them, either to their homes or lonely spots in parks and parking lots.

### **Relationships to Clients**

Among all interviewed men no romantic relationships or even friendships evolved with clients. IP5 is the only interviewee that experienced a long-term contact with a partner in contrast to the quick encounters the other interviewed described.

The common census among the interviewed is that certain differences between them and their clients is the reason why a deeper or even romantic



relationship was not able to emerge. Especially cultural differences and the oftentimes significant discrepancy in age and life position posed a huge obstacle for a more intimate contact. It is also described how there was no expectation of romantic involvement right away, and that the prominent appeal of sex work was obtaining money with quick encounters. While cultural differences were a contributing factor why no meaningful relationships were formed, it was pointed out that this is only relevant in regard to romantic relationships: IP4 and IP6 state how they expect their romantic partner to share their cultural ideas, but that they are willing and appreciative of friendships outside of their cultural roam. Nonetheless, clients not sharing the same interests and generally coming from a different generation posed problems in building a friendship.

IP4 and IP5 even describe how several encounters with partners were “horrible” experiences, with them feeling objectified and even having the impression that the German men thought of them as naive and as someone they could take advantage of. As IP5 recalls, some men pushed him to do things he normally would not agree to, which made him feel anxious, as he did not have a strong social circle yet. Notably, he also points out how he was able to hold nice conversations with other clients, but that the lack of chemistry and prominent language barriers complicated bonding.

Unlike the other interviewed, IP5 did have a long term involvement with a German client, where they met over eight months and built a friendly connection, which he had to end because he moved away from North Rhine-Westphalia.

### **Positive Experiences regarding Sex Work**

The interviewed men voiced several aspects of sex work that had a positive effect on them. The complexity of commercial sex becomes apparent when taking into account how experiences not only differ among all participants

but also for every individual. In this research it is important for me to not only go into detail what knowledge or which resources were obtained and enabled through sex work, but also to shine light on how positive experiences affected the interviewed men and how it helped them in aspects not in relation to capital. Among most interviewed, spontaneity and the possibility to see sex work as an effective short-term solution for urgent financial needs, were pointed out in positive light. IP4 and IP5 further describe how sex work is something for them that they can always rely on when they are facing financial struggle. This suggests that sex work is not only a way for MRSW to support themselves, it also implies that sex work is understood as some sort of security or solution they can rely on in situations of emergency, like not being able to find proper work, or facing debt and other financial hardships. As IP5 describes his situation, it elaborates on this assumption: Sex work gave him feelings of empowerment and agency, of being able to have the responsibility to take care of himself. Especially after his first encounters, he recalls feeling proud and confident. Sex work provides an opportunity for these young men to be able to influence and support their different life situations in ways that gives them authority.

IP7 heavily connects sex work with going out and party life in Cologne, and sees it as a fun and quick way to earn money to support himself. Operating in the gay night life is a huge factor of connecting and socializing with other men, building friendships or strengthening friendships, when going out with friends. The spontaneous and quick nature of nightlife hook-ups allows him to meet several clients a night.

Except for IP2, all interviewees enjoy sex with men – and while it is suggested that they would not have sexual encounters with most of their clients if they did not depend on the money – they also describe how they can, to certain extents, freely choose to meet a specific client or decline the offer. Even if the whole situation of sex work is not entirely voluntary, instances like these

give the MRSW the impression of agency and power, and that they are in charge of what they do and what they allow to happen to them.

### **Negative Experiences regarding Sex Work**

A common negative experience was shaped by unpleasant encounters with individual clients. IP4 and IP5 elaborate on their impressions of being seen as naive by the clients, due to their lack of German language skills, and thus consequently not being able to properly pronounce doubts or even discontent to certain activities. While this problem is not unique to MRSW it definitely is a hardship that distinguishes their experiences from those of German sex workers, or sex workers with advanced language skills. The interviewed men were oftentimes under the impression that their clients, who were mostly German and aged from their forties to sixties, were aware of the power dynamics and the emotional fragility some MRSW suffer from. Especially encounters that started in gay bars and clubs were shaped by certain anxiety and also scrutiny, because “you never really know what kind of person is taking you home”. This problem also applies in the virtual space, as IP5 describes feelings of pressure and nervousity, when men contacted him online and wanted an immediate date, “when you get to know someone online you always have to be skeptical and critical”. Especially for MRSW that maintain a social circle of LGBT-critical people, meeting clients can be a huge task, as being seen with a gay man can cause suspicion. IP4 elaborates on this, meeting men while living in a shared flat with heterosexual refugee men was oftentimes a challenge because he had to make sure that nobody saw him with these German men and that he did not go out too often without a valid reasoning.

For IP7 the most traumatizing experience related to sex work would be having unprotected sex with one client under the influence of alcohol. As he finds his clients in bars and does not exchange contact information, he was

afraid that he may have contracted a sexually transmitted disease. While he immediately went to the health department and took procedures, he recalls crying daily for two months, till he eventually could test negative for HIV, as he thought to himself that “he did not flee Syria to die of AIDS in Germany”.

### **Economic Capital: Financial Situation**

Among the interviewed, the financial situations were showing similarities. Five of the interviewed men described their financial situations to be a struggle before, but that sex work helped them with overcoming hardships, especially those in the beginning of living in Germany. While all interviewed pronounce content with their current financial situation, they still occasionally face certain financial struggles, like having a financially dependent family (IP2), or having to pay a sudden amount of money when the car broke down (IP7). IP1, IP3, IP5 and IP6 actually state how they are not depending financially on sex work anymore, but that it is something they would consider doing again if there was the desperate need.

As refugees, they are obligated payments of state support to help pay their rent and necessities, but as IP4 points out his frustration that there is the belief that refugees should be satisfied with the support they get. While he is grateful that state support exists, in his opinion most refugees are not satisfied with being dependent on donated clothing and food. Since refugees cannot work immediately upon arrival and even when they can, face a lot of problems with finding jobs immediately, sex work is one reliable way to work for your money and be able to freely chose what to spend your money on.

### **Cultural Capital: Embodied Capital**

The most common embodied capital earned through sex work is the acquisition of German language skills. All seven interviewed men claim to have

improved their language skills by meeting clients, or to have been motivated to learn the German language to be able to communicate with clients. IP5 states how trivial aspects, such as asking for directions or being able to communicate with service staff, was made possible by learning how to engage and be confident in small talk with German clients. The long-term engagement with one German client also helped him, and consequently his family, with understanding German paperwork and bureaucracy.

Furthermore, IP6 details how he has changed in his way of thinking, ever since being in Germany, and that he has been “Germanized” (eingedeutscht) in several aspects. Meeting older German men gave him an idea how Germans differ from Arabs, as an example he points out that Germans and Europeans are way more direct and explicit in saying what they want, which is in contrast to his life experiences in Syria where the intentions and needs of someone are not as quickly articulated. This helped him with communication in Germany because he had to unlearn to expect negative intent whenever a communication with Germans seemed hostile, and because it showed him that he can explicitly ask for something when he has a need.

This acquaintance of knowledge on how to behave in Germany through sex work can be found within the experiences of several interviewees. As IP7 stayed the first six months in a refugee camp, with his friends and social circle staying even longer up to almost one and a half years in said camp, he was thrown into German culture without the ability to make sense of it just yet. Inserting himself into the LGBT scene and meeting men in exchange for money made him realize how different German LGBT culture is to that in Syria. According to his observation, German men are way more promiscuous, they are less emotionally responsive and more honest. In comparison to the Arabs he knows, which tend to be more inclusive and friendly to strangers, he actually describes feelings of disappointment and sadness when coming here. The

contact to German clients definitely helped him with getting acquainted with these cultural differences and also learning to appreciate them, as he now has a circle of German friends.

IP6 was the only MRSW that developed a trusting and friendly relationship with a client, to the point where he would bring legal documents and similar paperwork to their meetings. The German man helped him with understanding what was asked to do, how to respond and especially where to go for further questions. This helped him and his family immensely to be able to understand German bureaucracy.

### **Cultural Capital: Objectified Capital**

Among most interviewed MRSW it is pronounced that the money earned through sex work fulfilled the role of self-fulfillment in regard to style and expression. IP7 has lived his first six months in Germany in a refugee camp in North Rhine-Westphalia, in which he lost all sense of identity and self-esteem. Wearing clothing that Germans civil society donated because they did not like it anymore was, for him, not satisfactory. The wish to be able to live and dress as himself again emerged quickly. IP4 felt similarly, by describing how the clothing he was given in refugee camps did not make him feel good. This does not suggest that the clothing Syrian men usually wear is different to those that Germans wear, and that they consequently need to develop a new style to fit into Germany. Rather it is the context of being a refugee, of not having all your best clothes with you when coming to Germany, and having to rely on second-hand clothing and donations, where MRSW feel the desire to invest money and change to be able to express themselves and feel comfortable navigating through society.

Furthermore, the topic of drug consumption was brought forward by IP3. He shares his experiences with drug use, which originated from meeting

men. It was not unusual for clients to give him Alkyl Nitrites (also called poppers in the gay community, an illegal sex drug which helps with relaxation), for which he developed an interest. Meeting gay men also introduced him to drugs such as cannabis, which he still consumes. He explains that the very liberal style of living in Berlin is the main reason for this, sex and drugs are a very big part of the LGBT lifestyle there, especially for migrant men.

For IP5 and IP7 getting a license and buying a car was an important investment. Especially for IP7 buying a car was crucial in order to find a job, as he has to travel to another city each day. Sudden costs like a broken tie rod are covered by spontaneous sex work.

Refugees are supposed to live in refugee camps in the first months to even years upon arrival in Germany. The state usually is responsible to get refugee men and women out of these camps and supply them with housing, although this process sometimes takes years. While sex work did not help the interviewed MRSW to find their way out of the camps and live on their own or in shared flats, it helps them with maintaining their housing situation, especially when they are not relying on state support. IP1, IP3, IP4, IP6, and IP7 live in shared flats, with IP2 and IP5 living in apartments of their own. Living alone in an apartment comes with certain advantages, that result in a more free and independent designing of life.

### **Cultural Capital: Symbolic Capital**

The qualifications among the interviewed men were really diverse. Both IP2 and IP7 have already studied in Syria. IP2 studied mechanical engineering and worked as a car parts manufacturer. IP7 studied communication for several semesters and worked as a journalist. He plans on continuing his study in Germany in the near future as he recently succeeded in his German language test for university.

Except for IP2 and IP7, all interviewed men voice their wishes to stay in Germany and take on the German citizenship, which would come with several privileges like voting, monetary support and receiving pension, and being prioritized like any other European Union applicant for jobs.

### **Social Capital: Social Circle**

The social circles in which the interviewed men act, proved to be very diverse. IP3, IP5 and IP7 detail how sex work has positively affected their circles of acquaintances and social lives. IP3 built several significant relationships to other LGBT-people during his time of doing commercial sex. He describes his social circle as very diverse, as one huge family consisting of, predominantly LGBT, Germans, Arabs, Eastern-Europeans, and other nationalities, in which it is common to support each other financially, or by helping each other out by sharing food. Within his social circle, he is able to freely express his identity as a gay Muslim man. He notes that his life completely changed after moving to Berlin and leaving his parents behind, as he is now able to entertain friendships with other gay men, to date, and to express his identity as a gay Muslim by going to Gay Prides. Many of his friends still go to school, are studying or work in retail.

IP5s experiences share similarities. He describes finding an open-minded theater to work at, as the best thing that has happened to him. His friends are from various cultural backgrounds and gender-identities, and also working in theaters. His favorite trait of his social circle is the family-like bond that has developed over the past years, and how his friends take care of each other, emotionally and financially.

IP7 describes his friends to be largely consisting of other refugee men and women, and Arabs. Due to his habit of partying and going to bars, he has developed another social circle of homosexual men, mostly Turkish, Bulgarian,



and Syrian. Keeping the two circles apart from one another is important to him, as his Muslim friends are not aware of his sexual orientation.

For IP1, IP2, IP4, and IP6, there was no change in friends and acquaintances due to sex work. IP1 and IP2 prefer to keep their social circles separated from sex work and the LGBT scene. Especially for IP2, keeping his commercial sex activities private is of highest priority, as he does not consider himself to be homosexual and clearly states that he does not want any contact to the gay scene and LGBT-community. Similarly to IP1, his social circle most dominantly consists of straight Arab men, that may be prejudiced against homosexuals. Maintaining their cultural ideas within their friendships and acquaintances is important for them, and one of the main foundations to build any relationship on. While IP4 also describes his social circle to be mostly consisting of other refugee men, he details how important it is to find new, and especially German, contacts, that could help him navigate through German life. His culture, religion and tradition are important to him, but finding a balance and learning about the German way of living is a goal for him. As he is currently looking for employment, his close friends actually support him, by sharing food and paying the bills, when going out. IP6 enjoys a similar company of friends and acquaintances. He describes finding German friends to be very difficult, as Germans tend to be reserved and very different from Arabs, that immediately bond with you.

### **Social Capital: Free Time Activities**

Among all interviewed men several similar free time activities were voiced. The interviewed men described their life situations to be very about socializing, meeting friends, eating out, going to bars, and enjoying nature and company. IP3 is the only interviewee that describes his experiences with recreational drugs and how it is a shared interest of him and his friends. Most

importantly, it is suggested that it developed due to the Berlin gay scene and meeting other homosexual men.

### **Experiences with German Society and Othering**

All interviewed men describe their experiences in Germany to be primarily positive. Especially as physical violence has not been part of the lives of the interviewed men in Germany, it can be interpreted that discrimination and racism operate in much more subtle ways. IP7 illustrates how he had a small conflict with a German coworker at work, and that he eventually was transferred to another department, which he interprets as a form of punishment, although the German coworker was the aggressor. For IP6 the cultural differences posed a hurdle in the first years of being in Germany, as it was hard for him to fathom whether Germans like or dislike him, due to their distant nature of socializing. Especially in the anonymity of the internet, there have been several instances of users sending racist and discriminatory messages, for example telling him to go back to his country. For him, IP5, and IP7 life in Germany constantly improved over the years, as they describe coming to Germany in 2015 and 2016 as very difficult, due to the huge influx of refugees and media attention at that time. In the first years of staying in Germany, feeling judged, outcast and lonely was a common sentiment among the interviewed men. Doing sex work was a particularly important step for IP3, IP5, and IP7 as they describe how it motivated them with pursuing personal improvement, to become more independent and confident, and find jobs and education to further support themselves.

For IP1 finding a job was crucial to feel like a part of German society. Similarly to IP3, IP4, IP5, and IP6, he wants to stay in Germany and take on the German citizenship and continue building an independent life.

Regarding the experiences gathered on dating apps, with clients and with

dating, all MRSW voice that their ethnicity and cultural background are significantly contributing to their success. While the interviewees do not describe this phenomena as something negative per se – after all, many MRSW heavily advertise their online profiles with racialized language, suggesting specific ideas of Muslim and Middle-Eastern men –, IP4 and IP5 elaborate on how several German clients made them feel objectified and taken advantage of. This cannot be separated from their ethnicity and cultural background, as they further detail how German clients used racialized language during the communication with them. An example for this would be pointing out their Arab features in regard to sexual activities, and adding the prefixes of Arab- and Muslim- to sexual vocabulary.

### **Critical Discussion**

The interviews showed just how drastically the lives and experiences of refugee men in Germany differ. While all of the interviewed men have been active in sex work, their unique life situations proved that commercial sex is used in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes.

The main motivation that can be made out is clearly financial angst and instability that inherently comes with being a refugee, someone that has left their home country in spontaneous circumstances, without having the privilege of properly planning the journey and taking all necessities with them, as they cross countries. The interviewed MRSW describe feelings of loneliness and estrangement, especially in the first months and years of being in Germany. Staying in refugee camps, being grouped with people that share no common interests and values with them, except for the refugee status, and uncertainty of their futures put serious pressure and sentiments of hopelessness on these men. As there are only few possibilities for refugee men to actively influence their life situations, sex work comes as an attractive, effective, and also efficient solution

for several problems. Especially, as the German legislation usually does not allow refugees to work in the first months or years of staying in Germany, the spontaneous and quick nature of meeting strangers for money, becomes an attractive option.

To elaborate on this, it can be observed with the shared experiences of most interview partners, that sex work was one of the only available options to feel certain agency and power over their lives. Understandably, it is heavily discussed within feminist discourses whether we can talk about free will and agency when it comes to sex work, especially as most interview partners elaborate, how they would not have pursued such measures if there was not the fear of poverty. But, on the other hand, it cannot be ignored how these men explicitly describe their lived experiences with sex work to certain extents as emancipatory and liberating.

We can see that MRSW use commercial sex in ways that are most comfortable and most cost-efficient for them. The experiences shared with me for this research do not reflect stereotypical images of sex workers, standing all night at street districts waiting for random men to pick them up – on the contrary, the interviewed men use technology and certain bars as their go-to method to find clients. Sex work is hence often linked to convenience and pleasure: MRSW enjoy their freedom to choose whom to have sex with and under which conditions. Other MRSW link sex work with partying and having nights out with their friends. Moreover, six out of the seven interviewed men described how they experience sex with other men as generally pleasing.

The impact technology has on sex work cannot be undermined. Except for one interviewee, all MRSW detail how they use dating apps as their source for finding clients. For these men doing sex work oftentimes appeared as a feasible possibility exactly because of social media. Especially as one interviewee describes how he got the idea of selling his underwear because there was a

visible demand, with men contacting him and offering great amounts of money. Another interviewee confesses that it would not make sense to decline certain offers. With the interviewees it showed that these online platforms are not the reason per se why they are starting to do sex work, but that they definitely are the reason why sex work appears to be such an easy and quick way to earn money. This is made visible when taking into account that six out of the seven interviewed men were not active in sex work before coming to Germany, which further suggests that online platforms did heavily influence the probability of doing sex work in Germany.

MRSW have sex with other men to earn money, in order to support themselves, to buy food and clothing, and to be able to pay bills. How economic capital is used for profit – or to better say, transformed – can be observed when looking on what the money is spent on exactly. It is pointed out by the interviewees, how the consequential possibility to dress and express themselves how they want is bringing them further feelings of self-determination and agency. A clear distinction is made between donated clothing and clothing they wish to wear, and, more importantly, how differently they perceive themselves and feel perceived by others in society. Furthermore, it can be observed how MRSW use their money to support their social circles and strengthen relationships to friends and family. With many of the interviewees, it is described how they financially support family and friends, especially in situations of socializing (going to the restaurant and other free time activities). With two interviewees, money is spent on getting a license, buying a car, and entertaining the costs that come with car ownership. This is a clear instance, how MRSW use their earned money to improve employment probability and establish more agency over their lives.

Sex work does not only offer financial ease, but the social and cultural components that come with it are acknowledged and valued as well. For the

interviewed men, sex work fulfilled the important purpose of meeting new people, to examine the mindsets of German men, to learn language skills, and gain knowledge on German social life, and to experience the positive effects of socializing. For most of the MRSW, no meaningful relationships formed with clients, but for some it helped as a gateway into the LGBT-community and finding other friends. As only two interviewees are conducting sex work by going to bars, they share their experiences of building relationships and finding a community there. With the online-based MRSW this real-life socializing aspect comes short, but is taking place in other dimensions, as friends and romantic partners can be found online, simultaneously to finding clients. Furthermore, the MRSW clearly state, how sex work made them feel less lonely and gave them motivation to socialize more. This coupled with their feelings of power and confidence, linked to sex work, made them more approachable, and, in return, influenced further interactions with people in society.

With the interviewed men it is observable that they were able to maximize their cultural capitals over time, especially because of sex work. All of the MRSW have sufficient language skills in German, with most of the interviewees describing how German clients were oftentimes their first complex contact with the German language. This served as the main motivation to learn swiftly, to be able to communicate without misunderstanding. Moreover, the interviewed men are able to pinpoint cultural differences and similarities between Syrians and Germans, which implies that knowledge on what German culture typically looks like, was gathered. In two instances the interviewed men clearly state how they have been *Germanized* in certain ways. This understanding how to navigate through social relationships to earn certain advantages can be seen with one interviewee, who details how one of his clients helped him with paperwork and understanding German bureaucracy. In return, the MRSW passed this knowledge onto his family, which resulted in further

cultural and social capital.

I already touched upon the positive effects clothing had on MRSW in regard to their self-worth and agency, this can be attributed to higher objectified cultural capital and also embodied cultural capital. As the new clothing they could afford influences the way they perceive themselves and are perceived by others (higher objectified cultural capital), they explain how this made them feel better about themselves and encouraged them to be more open towards others (higher embodied cultural capital). Analyzing the symbolic cultural capital appears more difficult. What we can see is that some MRSW are working on their education and getting their academic degrees. For five out of seven of the interviewed men, the German citizenship is one of their long-term goals.

Investigating the social and cultural capital of refugee men is highly interesting, as it is observable that they experienced great social and cultural setbacks when they fled to Germany. Especially social capital was reduced, as they are considered outsiders and foreigners to German society upon arrival. What we can notice when taking a look at cultural capital, is that Syrian men may have high cultural capital in their home countries (embodied cultural capital like fluent language skills, or symbolic cultural capital like degrees and qualifications), but that cultural capital does not translate from one society into another. Fortunately, it can be seen that these men were able to raise their social and cultural capitals by conducting sex work in several ways. The complexity of capital becomes apparent here, as economic, cultural, and social assets influence each other immensely and it is actually difficult to properly differentiate between them.

The social circles of the interviewed MRSW changed over time, resulting in higher social capital. Especially the connection to the LGBT-community helped several interviewees to find kinship and family-like relations, that continuously impact them. It has to be added that the men that are very closely

connected to the LGBT-community seem to enjoy certain privileges, such as studying and having work. On the other hand, it was made clear with one participant that the gay scene introduced him to recreational drug use. This experience with drugs is described to be a free time activity and having a fun time with friends only, sex work does not fulfill the purpose of financing this particular drug addiction. Additionally to this, several MRSW expound how sharing economic assets, paying bills for friends, and generally, financially supporting their social circle is a valued habit of every day's social interaction. Economic capital is thus transformed into social capital, as relations are strengthened. This behavior can be particularly seen with the MRSW that describe their social circles to be family-like.

Furthermore, some other MRSW explicitly wish to not get involved with the gay scene, especially as they value their Muslim community highly and see certain potential for conflicts. To them sex work is a more discreet topic. Nonetheless, all MRSW claim to have close connection to their cultural heritage and their religion by building and valuing Muslim communities and social circles in Germany. Reasons for this are distinguishable cultural differences between Syrian and German cultures. While Germans and German society are not described to be hostile, building connections with other Arabs comes way more effortless for these men. Especially for romantic relationships a partner with the same cultural background and religion was set as the condition. However, most MRSW described that they cherish their binational friendships with Germans and people from all over the world, and clearly argue for making an effort to find German and local connections.

All of the interviewed men describe instances of German men voicing great interest in their ethnicity. These MRSW are aware that their cultural background and ethnicity attract certain men, and actually differentiate them from other sex workers. As I mentioned before, finding MRSW on online



platforms was not a difficult task at all, as they deliberately display their identities as Muslim and Arab men on said platforms. It is common for MRSW to use racialized language themselves to allude to certain fantasies, they found German men to have. This suggests that MRSW have found a way to capitalize off of their identities. Surprisingly, the interviewed men do not describe negative feelings connected with this fetishization and role they are asked to fulfill. To the contrary, the more I talked to these MRSW, the more I developed the impression, that these men enjoy to act out this role that is expected from them. This content seems to stem from them usually fulfilling the dominant role with their clients. This suggests the idea, that the feelings of power and confidence MRSW describe to have experienced after having met with clients, may come inherently with the role they fulfill in these sex work relations. Sex work seems to give them the possibility to enact power and dominance over other men. The question, whether it is racist of German clients to expect or demand a racialized image of a Muslim man, does not seem to concern the interviewed men. To be more precise, MRSW are aware that they are selling an image, which seems to have the positive effect that it empowers them over their clients. The othering process is thus intersectional, as clients see MRSW not only as the sex workers, but also as the exotic Muslim man. Fortunately, this does not seem to have a negative impact on MRSW or even scare them off from getting into contact with other Germans.

Consequently, it can be observed that negative experiences with sex work stem from feeling insecure and clients taking advantage. Especially as the German language skills were lacking in the beginning of doing sex work, MRSW raised the concern, that German clients found them to be naive and gullible. While this put great pressure on these men, it also motivated them to learn German skills and become more confident.

Concluding we can say that MRSW use sex work to maximize their

profits by generating economic, social, and cultural capital. We can observe that MRSW are able to transform capital in ways that they are the most profitable for them. Raising economic capital can be understood to be the main motivation for doing sex work, but as the interviews showed, economic capital is further used to generate cultural or social profits. It is also distinguishable that MRSW use their cultural and ethnic background as assets they can use to generate these profits. Within this research, no great losses of cultural and social capital were observable due to sex work, as sex work was either strictly separated from the private life (some MRSW fear rejection by their community if their connection to sex work was made public), or they found themselves in sex work friendly environments.

### **Conclusion: Estimating Integration**

We have seen how MRSW use sex work in a variety of ways to generate different kinds of capital, and how they are able to transform these capitals to maximize and optimize their profits. Consequently, the question how this enables integration arises. As previously discussed in this paper, it is hard to define what integration actually looks like, thus it becomes a rather difficult task to define how integration can be measured exactly. I want to use the definition of integration I gave earlier to use as a lens through which I analyze the experiences shared with me in the interviews. The research and interview were designed in a way that the two-wayness of integration is made clear, and the subtle influences, of what integration may feel like to these men, become visible. Hence, it is apparent to not only ask the participants to describe what they are doing to integrate into society, but also how they feel perceived by society. This way it helps to understand whether their desires to integrate were encouraged or perhaps discouraged based on the reception they experienced in Germany.

Furthermore, it is crucial to develop criteria that indicate integration based on the information shared with me in the interviews. The most convincing

indicator for integration is that five out of the seven interviewees explicitly stated how they want to integrate into German society and aim for German citizenship. As integration is a time-consuming and difficult process, the mere will to integrate might be the biggest obstacle in order to find ways to become a member of society. When we define binational friendships and housing situations, as proposed by the Council of Europe (1997), as indicators of integration, we get an idea how this will to integrate is implemented and made possible in every day's social interactions.

Out of the seven interviewed MRSW, six men claimed to value binational and multinational friendships highly and pronounced how important it is for them to find German social contacts. At the same time, they also described that their Arab and Muslim social groups are of high importance as well. This suggests that there are processes of integration taking place, in contrast to assimilation, where the migrant would describe to lose connection to their former culture. This process is furthermore underlined, when acknowledging the German language skills obtained by the MRSW. Especially with the interviewed men that live in shared flats with other Arabs and refugees, and that maintain binational friendships, it is shown that they are able to navigate through society and different social groups by adjusting language-wise to the social group they find themselves in, in a given moment.

All of the interviewed men have secure housing situations and either live with other Arabs, multinational friends, or alone. Except for two MRSW, all interviewed men are employed or working on getting their degree. This data suggests that MRSW are able to live relatively independent lives and are able to take care of themselves, and go after their aspirations, like work and education.

More explicitly, out of the seven interviewed men, six stated themselves that they felt integrated into society. Sex work played a significant factor in this, as it helped these men to generate all sorts of capital. Money was earned and

spent on necessities, clothing, self-realization and -expression. This heavily influenced how these men perceive themselves and how to engage with society and social groups. All of the interviewed men describe how they sustain their different social groups with the money they earn through sex work. Cultural assets like language skills and knowledge on German culture helped these men to socialize with Germans, to find occupation and to develop binational friendships. Sex work also introduced several men to the LGBT-Community and the gay scene, which led to further group belongings and identification in Germany.

But, one of the greatest insights this research gives, is that sex work is one of the very few possibilities for these men to feel agency and confidence in situations of hopelessness. Next to economic capital this seems to be the biggest profit for the interviewed MRSW, as they universally associate these feelings with sex work and describe how they became more confident and self-assured. This heavily influences integration success. The interviews indicate that sex work appears to be one of the few feasible options for these men to achieve the goal of integration in the long-term, as it fulfills a variety of needs and functions. This brings us to the question, to which degree it should be tolerated that these refugee men have to resort to sex work in the first place. When I started this research I deliberately abstained from framing refugees that are active in sex work as stereotypical victims of the system. On the contrary, this research ought to highlight, how these men are able to improve their life experiences, given the complicated situations they find themselves in. It is understandable that refugees cannot join the German workforce immediately upon arrival. Many of these people suffer from emotional torment, have no language skills and knowledge of the German culture. But it cannot be ignored that the German legislature fails these people in several ways. Some refugees have fled their home countries, anticipating to work in a western country like Germany and

improve their lives. These people find themselves in a country which puts them in precarious housing situations, puts them through complicated bureaucratic processes, and in the end, does not allow them to work and be responsible for themselves, for months or even years. To get out of this predicament, they resort to sex work, as told in the interviews.

Fortunately, the interviewed men did not voice trauma regarding sex work. This definitely has to do with the sample of interview partners I was able to find, as these men were predominantly active on social media platforms. The experiences of MRSW that are homeless and earn their money by roaming parks and public areas can be expected to differ drastically. Nonetheless, with the gathered data, the research was able to pronounce that MRSW use sex work to fulfill various needs and to find ways to integrate themselves into society.

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## **Appendix: The Semi-Structured Interview Guideline**

### **1. Opening Questions**

- a. Tell me something about yourself. How long have you been in Germany?  
Where are you from? How old are you?

### **2. Questions related to Motives & Practice**

- a. Are you in a relationship? Is there something you want to share about your partner?  
b. How do you currently earn your money?  
c. When did you start earning money by meeting strangers? Where and how do you find your partners?

### **3. Questions related to Economic Capital**

- a. Do you earn enough money to make ends meet at the end of the month?  
b. Are there things you'd wish to but cannot afford? Are you saving your money?

### **4. Questions related to Cultural Capital**

(embodied)

- a. Do you talk to your partners? About what?  
b. Would you say you have changed ever since you are meeting strange men?  
c. Is there something you learn from your partners? Does the contact to German men influence your language skills, for example?

(objectified)

- d. What do you spend your money on?  
e. How would you describe your style and expression?

(symbolic)

- f. Did you graduate/major? What are your future plans?

### **5. Questions related to Social Capital**

- a. What do you do in your free time?  
b. Where/how do you live and with whom?  
c. How would you describe your friends and circle of acquaintances? How do they earn their money?

- d. Did your circle of friends change due to you meeting men?
- e. Is building a friendly or romantic relationship to your partners something you would consider?
- f. Why do you think German men contact you?
- g. How do you feel treated in everyday life?

### **6. Ending Questions**

- a. Would you say sex work is worth it? Even beyond earning money?
- b. Do you think sex work is only a temporary way of earning money for you?  
Do you have plans?

## **Declaration of Authenticity**

I, Roland Jistel, hereby declare that the work presented herein is my own work completed without the use of any aids other than those listed. Any material from other sources or works done by others has been given due acknowledgement and listed in the reference section. Sentences or parts of sentences quoted literally are marked as quotations. The work presented herein has not been published or submitted elsewhere for assessment in the same or a similar form. I will retain a copy of this assignment until after the Board of Examiners has published the results, which I will make available on request.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Student's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_