

Casual Encounters:  
Constructing Sexual Deviance on Craigslist.org

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- CJR

## **Dedication**

For my mother, Petricia S. Ward, 1957 - 2012.

## Abstract

Despite the prevalence of dating websites and hookup applications, mass communication scholars have largely ignored news coverage of sex in the digital age. Research about online sexuality has built on early theories of cyber identity, in which the Internet was conceptualized as a great emancipator. Online, it was argued, people could explore “disembodied” sexualities with little interference from offline reality. This dissertation builds a research line that investigates journalistic discourse about online sexuality using more than a decade of coverage of Craigslist sex forums as a case study. It also examines user activity on Craigslist sex forums, testing dominant theories of online identity.

For journalists, Internet-mediated sexuality represents a compound moral threat. Since 2003, national U.S. newspapers have consistently identified the classified ads website Craigslist as a hotbed for sexual deviants — people whose sexual interests *mainstream* culture deems immoral or even illegal. Newspaper journalists call on police and government sources to frame Craigslist users as prostitutes, violent criminals, and cheating politicians. By relying on elite sources, news media surveil social deviance for the public. This is an outcome of normative reporting practices.

Representational scholars have argued that media made by marginalized groups will provide more nuanced narratives than the mainstream press. But in stories about Craigslist sex forums, alternative media reproduce stigma about online sexuality. Popular LGBTQ and feminist online magazines describe Craigslist sex forums as catalysts for illegal and immoral activity. They sometimes privilege sex workers’ voices and cover the experiences of sexual minorities, but they contribute to the same deviance-defining discourse about Craigslist sex forums as does the mainstream press. Media across the ideological spectrum police social deviance and reinforce cultural norms — online and off.

Mass media surveillance of online sexuality encourages people to surveil their own behavior online. Ads on Craigslist sex forums reflect dominant cultural norms about sex despite posters’ attempts to explore their “unusual” fantasies. The Craigslist Casual Encounters forum provides a productive outlet for people to fantasize about kink, non-monogamy, race, and sexuality. But it also reflects the politics of its white male user base. Sexism, homophobia, and gendered logics saturate the forums. Offline stigmas about sexuality bleed into online sexual expression.

This dissertation theorizes the role of normalizing judgment in determining media representations of online sexuality. It offers perspectives from journalism sociology and cultural studies to help explain why media paint Craigslist sex forums as spaces that foster illegal and immoral sex. The dissertation concludes that online sexuality must be added to definitions of deviance in news. It problematizes theories of representations of sexuality by alternative media, and it demonstrates that online sexuality is deeply intertwined with offline identity.

**Keywords:** Critical Discourse Analysis, Cultural Studies, Journalism, New Media, Sexuality, Sociology of News, Stigma

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## Epigraph

“Suddenly, it seemed like every other person showed up for his no-strings blow job with a switchblade.” - *The Onion*, February 2011

## INTRODUCTION

During the years between its 1995 launch as a Bay Area events listserv and its maturation as the world's top classified ads website, Craigslist acquired a reputation for depravity. Media initially covered Craigslist as "the Web bulletin board where millions of people buy and sell stuff" (Walker, 2006). But by 2009, sex, violence, and scandal saturated reportage. Just weeks after law enforcement successfully pressured Craigslist to remove its Erotic Services forum from the site, headlines mythologized a "Craigslist Killer" linked to three sex workers' murders in Boston. *The New York Times* referred to Craigslist as the "erotic underbelly of society" (Quenqua, 2009), while the *Chicago Tribune* called it "the Internet's version of a seedy street corner, a largely unregulated hotbed of prostitution that allowed easy access to illegal sex" (Mitchum & Garcia, 2009). By describing Craigslist sex forums as prurient spaces and by framing Craigslist users as sexual criminals, journalists worked as agents of conservative ideology. The message was clear: "If it's just a sex crime it isn't a story. But if a listing on Craigslist was involved, it's a big story" (Arrington, 2010).

This dissertation, *Casual Encounters: Constructing Sexual Deviance on Craigslist.org*, intervenes in debates about sexual stigma and news ideology, examining Craigslist sex coverage as an example of reporting on sexual deviance — those sexual interests and actions perceived by *mainstream* culture as immoral or illegal (DeBlock & Adriaens, 2013; emphasis my own). I identify ideology, i.e. power structures, in narratives about Craigslist and sexual deviance in four representational spaces: social

science scholarship, national U.S. newspapers, LGBTQ and feminist online magazines, and Craigslist sex forums. I blend empirical methods with critical theory to examine why and how deviance-defining messages structure journalistic discourse about Craigslist sex forums. I also investigate the ways that Craigslist sex forums create productive spaces for users to explore “deviant” sexual fantasies, while still foundationally encouraging self-surveillance. *Casual Encounters* is thus a case study in the social construction of sexual deviance within four distinct media contexts.

### **Background and Significance**

The Casual Encounters sex forums host a fraction of the 80 million classified ads posted to Craigslist’s 700+ local sites each month (Craigslist, 2016). Casual Encounters rests humbly in Craigslist’s left sidebar, among links to 199 other forums for jobseekers and apartment hunters. Today, Casual Encounters is the only forum on Craigslist explicitly devoted to sex. Still active are dating forums for Men Seeking Women, Women Seeking Men, Men Seeking Men, and Women Seeking Women, which operate under the pretense of fostering longer-term romantic and sexual connections. But a decade ago, forums that openly advertised sex work and no-strings-attached sex were a primary contributor to Craigslist’s business model, and they attracted substantial attention from lawmakers, police, and journalists. Alongside Casual Encounters was the Erotic Services forum, and later the Adult Services forum. Those digital message boards allowed sex workers, masseurs, and exotic dancers to advertise their services publicly.

By 2009, police and lawmakers became increasingly concerned with sex work and sex trafficking on the Erotic Services forum. Journalistic attention peaked in 2009

and 2010 during a series of legal attacks against Craigslist. The classified ad giant caved under pressure from U.S. attorneys general. The site removed its Erotic Services forum and added a less-sexy Adult Services forum in its place, which was later pulled from the site and replaced with a black “Censored” bar. Since then, reporters have primarily covered the Craigslist’s sex forums in terms of sex crimes and sex work, law and regulation, sex scandals, and promiscuity in online dating culture.

But why have journalists focused on anomalous events that paint sexual activity on Craigslist as especially high-risk? Although the Federal Bureau of Investigation has described financial fraud (FBI, 2012) and extortion (Butler, 2016) as risks for online daters, there is not a conclusive relationship between online dating in the U.S. and sexual assault, violent crime, or disease acquisition. And while some research in the early 2000s suggested there may be a link between HIV acquisition and online-mediated hookups among gay and bisexual men, new studies have shown this is not the case (Heiman et al., 2016). As our online and offline lives continue to intersect, scholars must challenge tropes that paint the Internet as an especially dangerous place.

This dissertation argues that news media do not necessarily report on the statistical prevalence of online dating risks. Nor do they focus on the cultural importance of online dating platforms such as Craigslist. Instead they build discourse around Craigslist sex forums using the same news gathering techniques that guide all reporting. Those reporting techniques result in journalism that identifies deviant subjects and events as newsworthy. From a journalist’s perspective, sexual deviance on the Internet demands similar coverage as sexual deviance on the streets — especially when

online sex forum activity leads to offline arrests. This project expands existing theories of deviance as news by identifying trends that emerged in newspaper and alternative media reporting of Craigslist sex forums during the last 15 years. My research uncovers a deviance-defining paradigm present in contemporary journalistic writing about Craigslist sex forums, while pointing out internalized sexual stigma among posters who use Craigslist to seek casual sex.

### **Research Questions**

To explore the links between ideology and representations of sexual deviance, I address the following research questions:

- 1) What historical developments permitted sexual deviance to occupy public, journalistic, and scholarly imaginations?,
- 2) How have academic discourses about personal ads proliferated to construct public knowledge about sexual deviance in online advertising?,
- 3) How do contemporary U.S. newspapers represent Craigslist sex forums, and what do these representations indicate about ideology in mainstream news?,
- 4) How do contemporary LGBTQ and feminist online magazines represent Craigslist sex forums, and do these representations resist or comply with ideology in mainstream news?, and
- 5) How do self-representations in Casual Encounters ads resist or comply with ideology in journalism?

## **Chapter Organization**

Using theories of discourse and news sociology to guide this analysis, I investigate representations of Craigslist-mediated sexuality and the social construction of deviant sexual subjects who use Craigslist to arrange casual sex. The five chapters of this dissertation respond to those concerns as they apply to contemporary news media, contemporary alternative media, and Craigslist sex forums themselves.

In Chapter 1, I introduce theoretical perspectives necessary for understanding the development of deviance-defining discourse about online sexuality, as well as the importance of normalizing judgment to the news industry's professional ethos. I also walk readers through recent paradigms of sex science, including psychoanalysis and behavioral sexuality scholarship, which paved the way for defining sexual deviance. Finally, I articulate the importance of contrasting mainstream news representations of sexuality with alternative media produced for and by marginalized communities. I theorize online sex forums as self-representational spaces in which users explore their sexual identities while simultaneously reflecting cultural stigmas against sex.

In Chapter 2, I articulate the methods used to analyze the data in this dissertation. The data include U.S. newspaper stories about Craigslist sex forums, LGBTQ and feminist online magazine reportage about Craigslist sex forums, and sexual personal ads on Craigslist's Casual Encounters sex forums. I outline a rigorous and empirical qualitative coding method for critical discourse analysis, which is applied in Chapters 3, 4, and 5. A schematic for the dissertation's methodology is also provided.

In Chapter 3, I analyze stories published about Craigslist sex forums in seven contemporary U.S. newspapers between 2003 and 2016. Sampled newspapers include the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Denver Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and *The Washington Post*. I call out themes in reportage across time and geography, illustrating trends in reportage that focus on surveilling and monitoring sexual deviance. I demonstrate that mainstream newspaper reporting relies on police and government officials to frame stories, and that news articles most commonly report on Craigslist within the context of sex crimes and sex work, high-profile sex scandals, lawsuits and regulation surrounding Craigslist, and promiscuity in online dating culture. By providing descriptive statistics about themes in news stories alongside in-depth qualitative analysis of the reportorial rhetoric, I illustrate conservative ideology within news narratives about Craigslist sex forums.

Chapter 4 mimics Chapter 3 in terms of its methods of analysis. In Chapter 4, I analyze representations of Craigslist sex forums in LGBTQ and feminist online magazines between 2005 and 2016. I code articles published in six U.S. online alternative media, including *The Advocate* online, *Bitch* media, *Feministing*, *Ms. Magazine*, *Out.com*, and *Pride.com*, and compare those with representations of Craigslist sex forums in the newspaper sample analyzed in Chapter 3. I theorize LGBTQ and feminist online magazines as “vernacular” media based on their mission to provide counter-hegemonic representations of gender and sexuality. Like newspapers, LGBTQ and feminist online media cover online dating culture, sex crimes and sex work, law and regulation, and sex scandals. But they do so while featuring the marginalized voices of sex workers and

Craigslist's clientele, and by calling out the utility of Craigslist for LGBTQ-identified people. By comparing news coverage in mainstream U.S. newspapers with that in LGBTQ and feminist online media, I demonstrate a consistent deviance-defining ideology across mainstream and vernacular outlets, while emphasizing more progressive narratives present in outlets targeted to women and sexual minorities.

In Chapter 5, I analyze self-representations of sexuality on Craigslist's Casual Encounters sex forums in Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York City between 2003 and 2016. By turning away from mass media to understand sexuality as articulated by sexual subjects themselves, I uncover discrepancies between the subjects reported upon in the mainstream and vernacular press and activity observed on Craigslist. I demonstrate that Casual Encounters posters tend to be young-to-middle aged white men who use the forum to express fantasies they perceive as especially deviant. Indeed, Casual Encounters personal ads solicit casual sex and sometimes arrange sex work. But more importantly, the forums provide an outlet for LGBTQ people, non-monogamous people, and kink and fetish communities who use the Internet to explore sexualities that mainstream culture deems abhorrent. This chapter untangles the tensions between online exploration and self-surveillance as Craigslist users post digital personal ads for sex.

## **Outcomes**

The five chapters in this dissertation centrally examine representations of Craigslist-mediated sexuality, converging in the conclusion, where a discussion of themes between and across the sample articulates an overarching narrative about sexual deviance in media culture. This research demonstrates that mainstream and alternative news media



produce normalizing messages about online sexuality and Craigslist sex forums, and that cultural ideology about sexual deviance also bleeds into posts for sex on the Casual Encounters forums. I illustrate the pervasiveness of stigma against marginalized sexualities within culture at large. Those stigmas are produced and repeated within social science research, national newspapers, vernacular online magazines, and online personal advertisements for casual sex.

This dissertation illustrates the diffusion of cultural messages about sexual deviance within a circuit of culture (see DuGay et al., 1997). It builds an argument suggesting that the journalistic profession was primed for producing deviance-defining messages about Craigslist, and that news articles about Craigslist's sex forums reflect patterns of Othering common to media industries and Western sexual scripts. Surveillance of sexual deviance is an important part of normalizing judgment in U.S. culture, and it is reflected not only in our nation's diverse mass media systems but also within self-expressions of sexuality online. Stigma against online sexuality has been especially pervasive during an era when new technologies and alternative sexualities represent compounded moral threats.

## CHAPTER 1

### **Defining Deviance in Journalism and Sexuality Research**

Craigslist has preoccupied journalists for more than a decade. Discourse about the website's sex forums appeared in national U.S. newspapers in 2003, and coverage proliferated through the alternative press by 2005. News stories have focused on sex crimes and sex workers, sex scandals among society's elite, legal battles between Craigslist and U.S. courts, and the men and women who turn to the Internet to orchestrate promiscuous, high-risk sex. But why have such trends arisen in reportage of Craigslist sex forums? How have journalists determined which stories to tell and which stories to skip when reporting about online sexuality? This chapter situates news discourse about Craigslist within broader historical narratives of sexual deviance and the press's role in surveilling deviant populations and events. It also theorizes the functions of ideology within mass and interpersonal media. I call out the importance of analyzing discourse about Craigslist sex forums in the mainstream press and the alternative press. I also compare those mass mediated representations with messages about sexuality written by posters on Craigslist sex forums.

Like tourists of the world's red light districts, readers expect news media to provide glimpses into the lives of sexual Others. Two fields help explain this phenomenon: cultural studies and the sociology of news. Since Antonio Gramsci's (1971) influential theorization of mass media as an ideological regime, cultural theorists such as Louis Althusser (1971), Stuart Hall (1992), and Edward Said (1978) have

concretized the political role media play in shaping “us vs. them” dichotomies in culture. However, journalism scholarship draws on its own sociology of meaning making, with ethnographers such as Gaye Tuchman (1978a, 1978b) and Mark Fishman (1980) establishing newsroom culture and bureaucratic influence as antecedents to news production. Responding to professional norms as well as what sells, journalists write about “abnormal” behavior and events. The most marketable news illuminates social and moral disorder (Schudson, 2003). Some scholars argue *all* news stories report on deviance (Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1987). This dissertation applies perspectives from the sociology of culture and the sociology of news to link Craigslist sex coverage with systemic Othering.

While mass communication researchers have quantified representations of sex in large-scale content analyses of TV (Kunkel et al., 1996 - 2005) and magazine advertisements (Baker, 2005), cultural studies work has advocated for “positive representations” of minorities that displace stigma about deviant identities (see Hall, 1997, and Schiappa, 2008). Scholars of racialized discourses have especially argued for increased scholarly attention to alternative media made for and by minorities, and for analysis of self-representations (Ono & Pham, 2008). This dissertation theorizes LGBTQ and feminist online magazines as alternative media in the case of Craigslist sex coverage. I argue that ideological content exists in mainstream stereotypes, in more complex alternative news, and even in self-representations of sexuality because ideology is culturally pervasive. This dissertation identifies a dominant representational paradigm (see Hall, 1997, and Kuhn, 1970) within mainstream news stories about Craigslist sex

forums while illustrating the sometimes-oppositional messages present in LGBTQ and feminist online magazines. It also contrasts journalistic reportage in mainstream and vernacular news with online self-representations. On Casual Encounters forums, posters articulate their sexual orientations, sexual desires, and cultural sexual values (Reynolds, 2015), thus providing a window into sexual identity construction at the individual level. I demonstrate that individuals' Casual Encounters posts respond to sexual stigma in culture (see Goffman, 1963, and Herek, 2009), allowing in some cases for resistant self-expression, as with BDSM, kink, and transgender communities, while reflecting internalized homophobia and sexual shame in others, as among "straight" posters seeking other "straight" people for homoerotic trysts. My research traces dominant ideologies regarding sexual deviance and online advertising from academic discourse through mainstream news and alternative media into self-representational spaces. Fundamentally, this project is an applied study in the social construction of a deviant sexual subject who posts personal ads online.

### **Sexual Deviance in Scholarly Discourse**

In order to trace the evolution of discourses about sexual personal ads and deviance on Craigslist forums, it is important to survey previous research on sexuality, personal advertising, and deviance in the news. Although no research has examined representations of Craigslist in the news or Craigslist sex forums as catalysts for sexual identity exploration, theoretical perspectives from sexuality studies, news sociology, and digital identity studies provide rationale for examining both. In response to RQ1 — "What historical developments permitted sexual deviance to occupy public, journalistic, and scholarly imaginations?" — this literature review first historicizes the field of

sexuality studies, describing the psychoanalytic tradition and behaviorist research lines that produced normalizing discourses about sexuality, and which also allowed for the development of constructivist sexuality studies alongside other political and cultural theories about identity in the 1970s. Second, I outline the constructivist approach to mass communication research, which articulates the discursive roles media play in producing and reflecting normative ideology. Here I also describe a line of news sociology concerned with the over-reportage of social deviance in news, which — although rich in insights about crime and race relations — sidesteps sexual deviance reportage. In response to RQ2 — “How have academic discourses about personal ads proliferated to construct public knowledge about sexual deviance in online advertising?” — I trace a wave of deviance-defining research about sexuality and personal ads back to the 1960s. I introduce a limited body of contemporary work about Craigslist, research about which is conducted almost entirely by scholars of public health. The literature review thus sets foundations for this dissertation’s first intellectual endeavor: Historicizing the development of discourses surrounding “normal” and “deviant” sexuality in personal ads. It also identifies a gap in constructivist mass communication research about sex in media in general, and about sexual personal ads in particular.

**Sexuality studies and the normalizing gaze.** The French philosopher Michel Foucault theorized the relationships between power, cultural norms, sexuality, and the self. In *Discipline & Punish*, his influential text on penal institutions, Foucault articulated three instruments used to discipline populations: hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment, and examination (Foucault, 1977). Hierarchical observation occurs when those in power surveil a population, as by a police force or public health unit; normalizing judgment occurs when the views of those in power determine what is

“normal” and “abnormal” in a population, and the “different” are disciplined accordingly; and examination occurs when hierarchical observation and normalizing judgment are linked in order to systematically identify and treat “abnormal” cases, such as disease in the body or criminals in society (Foucault, 1977; Ells, 2003). Of particular interest to this dissertation is the concept of normalizing judgment, which is “made by differentiating, comparing, ranking, evaluating, and excluding individuals” in society (Foucault, 1977, p. 183). According to the feminist bioethicist Carolyn Ells, “We are made to feel that at any moment we are being watched and judged. In response, we watch, judge, and control our own behavior in accordance with a normalizing gaze” (Ells, 2003, p. 215). I extend the concept of discipline — and especially its sub-concepts of normalizing judgment and examination — to the study of sexual deviance in personal ad research. This dissertation is therefore invested in the project of identifying normalizing discourses in sexuality studies and understanding their productive and repressive outcomes. My research contributes to a line of critical-historical research that seeks to untangle the complex relationship between culture’s normalizing gaze and understanding of the sexual self.

**A brief history of sexuality studies.** Sexuality research has captivated high-profile scholars since the Victorian era, when sexuality was first medicalized by biologists and psychiatrists (Foucault, 1976). By the turn of the 20th century, Sigmund Freud had begun formulating the early theories of psychoanalysis, first described as a “talking cure” used to treat hysterical women. Freud categorized hysteria as a neurological condition resulting from the pathological manifestation of repressed sexual memories (Freud & Breuer, 1895). By 1905, Freud had published his seminal *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (Freud, 1905), in which he outlined six psychosocial

phases of sexual development, ranging from the oral and anal phases of infantile development to the mature genital sexual phase that occurs in adults post-puberty. Although Freud contributed novel approaches to sexual psychology and pioneered psychotherapy, his theories of sexual development hinged on normalizing discourses including “development” and “perversion.” Freud was also an ardent critic of the women’s liberation movements of the time (Lasch, 1974). Wrote the feminist scholar Eva Figs in *Patriarchal Attitudes*, “Of all the factors that have served to perpetuate a male-oriented society...the emergence of Freudian psychoanalysis has been the most serious” (Figs, 1970). By activating disciplinary surveillance, Freud’s “talking cure” became a textbook example of “examination,” in which the psychotherapist’s end goal is to “cure” the patient from “repression” or “perversion.”

Freud’s psychoanalytic theories gave way to an even more visible wave of sexuality research in post-war America, during which scholars of sexuality began measuring sexual desire and sexual behavior. Foremost among the pioneering behaviorists were the now-ubiquitous names in sexology: Alfred Kinsey, William Masters, and Virginia Johnson. Kinsey was a Harvard-trained biologist and professor of zoology at Indiana University. Although he was hired to research sexual reproduction in gall wasps, Kinsey’s scholarly interests shifted to human sexuality in the 1930s (Kinsey Institute, 2016). By the early 1940s, Kinsey was studying human sexuality full-time, launching research that would eventually be published as *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953). The *Sexual Behavior* papers, also known as *The Kinsey Reports*, are credited as the first major studies of human sexuality in the social and behavioral sciences.

Kinsey was able to statistically describe the sexual experiences of American men and women by re-coding interviews with 11,000 subjects into quantitative data, which he used to taxonomize “norms” of human sexuality. While sexual norms were previously defined by the family, church, government, and local gossip circles, Kinsey’s research firmly embedded a normalizing judgment about sexuality within the academic sphere. *The Kinsey Reports* also championed female sexual desire and introduced to the public a now-standard model for understanding human sexual identity: The Kinsey Scale, which placed sexual behavior on a seven-point continuum ranging from exclusively heterosexual to exclusively homosexual. Although Kinsey’s work adhered to post-positivist foundations and exemplified normalizing judgment by identifying normal and abnormal sexual identities and behaviors, it “represents the first major break from the medical and psychoanalytic conceptions that dominated prior thought (about human sexuality)” (Gagnon, 1990a; Gagnon, 1990b). Today the Kinsey Institute at Indiana University is one of the most productive sex research institutes in the world.

William Masters and Virginia Johnson were a husband-wife team at Washington University in St. Louis, where Masters was a well-regarded obstetrician-gynecologist. Together they launched the Reproductive Biology Research Foundation (later re-named the Masters and Johnson Institute) and pioneered research on sexual response and sexual dysfunction. Masters and Johnson’s primary contribution to sexology came from two research volumes, *Human Sexual Response* (1966) and *Human Sexual Inadequacy* (1970). *Human Sexual Response* outlined the physiology of sexual responses ranging from nipple stimulation to dermal flush by drawing on observations of 312 men and 382 women (Masters & Johnson, 1966). Although rife with normalizing language, *Human Sexual Inadequacy* introduced sex therapy to the field of sexology, providing



physiological evidence for treatment of “dysfunctions” such as premature ejaculation and vaginismus. *Human Sexual Inadequacy* also argued that sexual “dysfunction” is reflective of poor inter-partner communication and as a result can be “cured” through talk therapy (Masters and Johnson, 1970). Masters and Johnson’s methodology grew out of the psychoanalytic tradition, and its curative approach should also be problematized by applying concepts of disciplinary surveillance and examination.

*The social construction of sexuality.* Behavioral scholars of the post-war years ushered in a novel era of psycho-social sexuality research. The behaviorists were fundamentally concerned with describing “normal” and “abnormal” sexualities as defined through grand-scale interviews and participant-observation. Kinsey’s and Masters and Johnson’s work all contributed to a normalizing, biologically essentialist model of sexual behavior in which dichotomies of man-woman and of heterosexuality-homosexuality lay unchallenged. Revising the biological essentialism discourse were cultural feminists, among them sociologist Nancy Chodorow, who applied feminist perspectives to human sexual development (DeLamater & Hyde, 1998). However, even political theories contributed to binary models of gender and sexuality by proposing that “women and men do differ because of socialization and that women are at least equal to and possibly superior to men” (Rollins, 1996, in DeLamater & Hyde, 1998).

The cultural turn of the late-1960s and 1970s finally interrogated essentialist frameworks of earlier sexuality scholarship. While sociologists such as Erving Goffman positioned sexuality in conversations about cultural stigma and deviance (Goffman, 1963), more radical work was being conducted by the social constructionists. This new paradigm suggested that sexuality is formed, as are all other identities, through language and social learning. Although Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann argued that sexuality

is “grounded in biological drives” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), their social construction of reality thesis credited culture in forming “habitualized” and “institutionalized” norms of sexual expression (DeLamater & Hyde, 1998). That is, social constructionists believed that our experiences of reality and identity are grounded in five maxims of human perception:

- 1) Our world is ordered, and ordered experiences allow us to perceive an “objective” reality that appears independent of individual thought,
- 2) We describe reality using language that allows us to structure our world through “typifications,” which constitute our understanding,
- 3) Humans perceive reality in relatively similar ways, and language allows us to share our experiences,
- 4) Shared “typifications” are eventually normalized through institutions and habitualized as a form of social control, and
- 5) Knowledge may be societal or localized to subgroups, and there may be conflicts between the normalized “typifications” used by different groups (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; DeLamater & Hyde, 1998).

While Berger and Luckmann were unable to escape the discourses associated with essentialism and sexual norms, their theory moved beyond strictly biological and statistical models for understanding sexuality. Social constructionism posited that culture was essential to the development of identity.

Many researchers in the 1970s expanded Berger and Luckmann’s original theory of social construction. Of most relevance to this dissertation are John Gagnon and William Simon, whose 1973 book, *Sexual Conduct*, elaborated on the thesis that sexuality is culturally constructed. For the authors and other post-structuralists and

social constructionists of the time, sexuality was not a “universal phenomenon which is the same in all historical times and cultural spaces” (Gagnon, 1990b, p. 3; DeLamater & Hyde, 1998). In *Sexual Conduct* Gagnon and Simon first introduced their sexual script theory, a model for understanding how sexual norms are learned and enacted by individuals within culture, and in particular geographic and historical locations. The authors argue that, much like actors on a stage, individuals perform sexual scripts, which they learn through interactions with others, the self, and culture as a whole (Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Simon & Gagnon, 1984).

Like Berger and Luckmann’s description of social constructionism, Gagnon’s essay in the *Annual Review of Sex Research* articulated a theory of sexual scripting in terms of five primary maxims:

- 1) Sexuality is not experienced as a universal through time and space,
- 2) Other than the body parts engaged in sexual activity, there is little that necessarily links sexual experiences among individuals through eras and cultures,
- 3) sexual sciences are historical products,
- 4) Sexual experiences and sexual acts are products of social learning within a given culture, and
- 5) Gender and sexuality are linked in most cultures, but both are learned within culture (Gagnon, 1990b).

This dissertation depends on definitions of social constructionism and sexual scripting provided by Berger and Luckmann and Gagnon and Simon.

### **Sex and Media Research**

As a discipline, media studies owes much of its analytical power and critical relevance to social constructionism, which contributed prominently to ancillary fields

such as cultural studies and media sociology. For instance, Stuart Hall's theorization of representation and Gaye Tuchman's theory of symbolic annihilation (Tuchman, 1978a) could not have described media's oppression of minorities without addressing the concepts of social constructionism. And many studies of news deviance have relied on social construction to explain the amplification of social problems in the news (Tuchman, 1978b; Vasterman, 2005). Even Albert Bandura's social learning theory drew upon the social construction of reality in order to explain modeled media behavior: "Because the symbolic environment occupies a major part of people's everyday lives, much of the social construction of reality and shaping of public consciousness occurs through electronic acculturation," he wrote (Bandura, 2001, p. 271).

However, studies of sexuality in mass communication have remained stubbornly rooted in post-positivism, a reflection of the field as a whole. Theoretical work has focused primarily on testing social learning theory as it applies to sexual media content and its effects on young people's sexual identity formation (see Bandura, 1986; Jensen & Jensen, 2007), and quantitative content analyses of sexual media remain the norm. In the '80s and '90s, well-cited studies analyzed the change in televised sex content during the HIV crisis (Lowry & Shidler, 1993), sex in soap operas (Greenberg, Abelman & Neuendorf, 1981; Lowry & Towles, 1989), and invisibility of LGBTQ people in media (Steiner, Fejes & Petrich, 1993). Other well-cited analyses have concerned gender roles on MTV music videos (Sommers-Flanagan, Sommers-Flanagan & Davis, 1993) and sex in popular shows such as "Sex and the City" (Jensen & Jensen, 2007). Content analyses of sex on TV were especially popular at the turn of the millennium, with the Family Hour Study (Kunkel, Cope & Colvin, 1996), the Teen Study (Cope, 1998), the V-Chip Study (Kunkel, et al., 1998) and the Sex on TV Studies (Jensen & Jensen, 2007; Kunkel,

et. al. 1999, 2001, 2003, 2005) demonstrating that popular media portray sex as a low-risk recreational activity that rarely necessitates relationship commitments, contraceptive use, or acknowledgment of potential physical or emotional consequences (L'Engle, Brown & Kenneavy, 2006). Relatively little scholarly attention has been paid to sexuality in newspapers and news broadcasts. The limited work on sexuality in news media has centered on sex crimes in the pre-Craigslist era (Benedict, 1993; Soothill & Walby, 1991) and sexual science news (McBride et al., 2007).

**Social deviance in the news.** The lack of scholarship on sex reportage necessitates further research on sexuality in the news. Although scholars have created reporting guides about sexuality for student journalists (Castañeda & Campbell, 2005) and others have called for research on mass media's effects on sexuality (Brown, 2002), truly little work has been conducted on representations of sexuality in news journalism. Further, no existing scholarship offers a theorization of reporting on sexual deviance, despite a substantial body of literature on other types of deviance reporting. This dissertation responds to these gaps in the literature. In order to analyze coverage of Craigslist sex forums, I turn to scholarship on news ideology by Gaye Tuchman and Michael Schudson, and to *Visualizing Deviance* (Ericson, Baranek & Chan, 1987), an influential ethnography of deviance reporting.

In *Making News: A Study in the Social Construction of Reality*, Tuchman wrote that newsmaking is a normative process (Tuchman, 1978a). News ideology is produced by cultural, institutional, professional, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and linguistic norms, as well as journalistic values and newsroom routines. This dissertation theorizes the aforementioned factors as antecedents to normalizing judgment in news, i.e. news ideology. News media reproduce the status quo because they rely on institutional

sources that validate normative opinions and construct a normative frame in news stories. Newspapers rely on normalizing institutional sources because they are reliable and self-validating, meaning they contribute to a newspaper's air of prestige (Tuchman, 1978a). Beyond sourcing practices, reporting routines contribute to news ideology because they identify deviant and pre-scheduled events as newsworthy. Journalists are embedded in institutional beats, and events within those beats typically become news. (Tuchman, 1978a). Consider, for instance, a police beat in which a journalist attends a sex crime press conference, which meets criteria for a pre-scheduled event about a deviant act. Tuchman would expect stories about the sex crime, using police sources, to appear in the news. She argued that journalists reproduce institutional ideology, re-presenting biases against social deviance. I explore this at depth in Chapter 3.

In *The Sociology of News* (2003), Michael Schudson extended Tuchman's observations. Schudson argued that U.S. news is biased by journalistic practices and by bureaucratic factors. He used a sociology of knowledge framework to position journalism as normative ideology. Because modern-day U.S. journalism developed at the turn of the 20th century alongside social science, Schudson argued, it possesses a similar "objectivist" ethos that self-identifies reportage as a rigorous, empirical genre of sensemaking. This guise of empiricism is a central part of news ideology. To Schudson, news is not merely about deviant events; news is the outcome of sourcing practices, which privilege institutional voices available for comment about deviant subjects, behaviors, and occurrences (Schudson, 2003). U.S. reporters hope to craft "holy shit!" stories based on conflict, violence, fear, and social or moral disorder. "Holy shit!" stories, like Craigslist sex crime coverage, are said to "have legs" because they foster public discourse and call for follow-up reporting (Schudson, 2003). Elite sources, which

Schudson labeled “parajournalists,” include public relations writers and public information officers. These “authorized knowers” essentially set the news agenda, determining whether a deviant event is a story or not. Schudson said that U.S. news media have historically been statist and nationalist, corporate, and are politically aligned with public interests, such as minimizing crime and corruption. Despite being perceived as politically liberal, news media reinforce state-verified systems of knowledge and offer punitive and proactive strategies for addressing deviant events, including sex crimes (Schudson, 2003). Cultural commentary of the early 2000s noted that Craigslist got caught in the news net (Tuchman, 1978a). For instance, reporter Michael Arrington wrote for *TechCrunch* that “If it’s just a sex crime it isn’t a story. But if a listing on Craigslist was involved, it’s a big story” (Arrington, 2010).

While Tuchman and Schudson theorized the prevalence of deviance in journalism as an outcome of reporting practices and news values, a research team from Toronto took the theory one step further: They argued that deviance is not occasionally reported as news; but that deviance constitutes all news (Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1987). This distinction is finicky but crucial. To demonstrate this theory, the authors conducted an ethnography of two Toronto news outlets (a newspaper and a television station). Observations revealed that the news organizations had a singular mission: To describe, explain, justify, and/or excuse unanticipated behavior and events (Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1987). In Western media, the essence of news is social deviance and control, they wrote. As moral authorities such as the church and the government take a backseat in culture, news media define deviance for popular audiences, effectively becoming moral authorities in the absence of more traditional thought leaders. News journalists rely on government, police, academic and other institutional sources to

produce moral leadership. Those sources are known as the “deviance-defining elite” (Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1987).

Sociological examinations of deviance in news, and of deviance as news, help representational scholars understand the prevalence of certain themes within content. Although no research has yet been conducted on news stories about Craigslist sex forums, journalism sociology tells us that we should expect sex crimes to be caught in the “news net” and framed through an institutional “web of facticity” (Tuchman, 1978a). We also expect news media to provide “definitions of social deviance,” which are “essentially expressions of dominant ideology in moral terms.” (Ericson, Baranek & Chan, 1987, p. 58). In *Visualizing Deviance*, Ericson, Baranek, and Chan cited a Scottish content analysis (Ditton & Duffy, 1993), which found that sex crimes were fourteen times overrepresented and violent crimes twenty times overrepresented in Glasgow newspapers, when compared with official crime statistics. This dissertation shows that U.S. newspapers and LGBTQ and feminist online magazines have also overrepresented Craigslist-based sex crimes in the news.

**Sexual personal ads.** Mass communication research about sexual personal ads and online-mediated sexuality is scant. However, a significant line of research from psychology and public health has addressed representations in sexual personal ads. Since the 1970s, psychologists have examined how homosexual men and women use personal advertisements to seek same-sex partners (Laner & Kamel, 1978; Laner, 1978). This research gained popularity after personal ad columns became common in gay newspapers during the 1960s and '70s (Child, Low, McCormick, & Cocciarella, 1996; Deaux & Hanna, 1984; Rosenbaum, Daunt, & Jiang, 2013). Early studies of personal ads sought to explain how LGBTQ people (called “homosexuals” in the research)



promoted themselves in ad content. Laner's 1978 *Media Mating* papers supported hypotheses that personals written by gay men would be frank about sexuality and would highlight virility (Laner & Kamel, 1978). Laner's study of lesbian personal ads supported hypotheses that lesbians' ads would present androgynous sexualities and would otherwise be similar to ads written by heterosexual women (Laner, 1978). This early research was crucial to understanding self-representations of sexual identity and sexual desire among subcultures that were largely invisible before gay-tailored media were widely distributed. However, by using terminology such as "homosexual" and by focusing on stereotyped identities, Laner's studies produced a normalizing gaze, limiting discourse about personal ads to deviance research.

The scientific community gradually recognized that newspaper and magazine personals were rich sources for sex and relationship data. Personal ad studies accumulated through the mid-1990s. They emphasized essential differences between personality, demographics, lifestyle, and romantic and sexual qualities described by gay and straight men and women in newspaper classifieds sections (Deaux & Hanna, 1984; Gonzalez & Meyers, 1993; Kenrick, Keefe, Bryan, Bar & Brown, 1995). However, as the Internet began to transform the ways people sought romantic and sexual encounters, researchers looked to new media for sexual identity data. Just four years after the introduction of the World Wide Web, scholars were publishing about queer online identity, suggesting "mailing lists, electronic mail, web pages, MOOs/MUDs and electronic chatting all offer new ways of expressing and analyzing queerness" (McLean & Schubert, 1995, p. 4852).

As Internet use proliferated across class and social divides, researchers tracked how the Internet influenced LGBTQ communities. McKenna and Bargh (1998) showed that Internet newsgroups of the late '90s provided social support for people with marginalized sexual identities. Additionally, Gray (2009), Marciano (2011), and others (Bond, Hefner & Drogos, 2009; Hillier & Harrison, 2007) argued online expressions of queerness eased young peoples' coming out processes. Academics lauded the Internet's role in normalizing LGBTQ sexuality, highlighting that "part of the appeal of the Internet for gays and lesbians is that within the safe cyberspaces of the Internet, identities can be shaped, tested, and transformed" (Gudelunas, 2005; Woodland, 2000). By the early 2000s, research on gay culture and online personal ads had taken off. Studies were published about online personal ads and their intersections with race and sexuality (Phua & Kaufman, 2003), intentional acquisition of HIV (Tewksbury, 2003), and age-based stigma (Kaufman & Phua, 2003). Public health units also identified Craigslist forums as potential hosts for STI and HIV interventions (Klausner, Levine & Kent, 2004). However noble and novel this early research, scholars focused on personal ad forums as surveillance tools through which to analyze queer people, pigeonholing gay men (and especially HIV-positive men) as a community in need of examination and intervention.

***Craigslist.*** By the 2010s, Craigslist sex forums were a common news item and also a common research topic. Public health scholars had begun investigating Craigslist as a tool for gay men to meet other gay men, and in turn as a mediator for HIV transmission (Grov, Agyemang, Ventuneac, & Breslow, 2013; Grov & Crow, 2012; Moskowitz & Seal, 2010) and syphilis surveillance (Fries, Ho, Segre, & Polgreen, 2011).

Researchers also identified Craigslist as a particularly useful site for recruiting study participants for sexuality research (Grov, Ventuneac, Rendina, Jimenez, & Parsons, 2013). In 2013, scholars began investigating how Craigslist users identified themselves in sex ads (Rosenbaum, Daunt, & Jiang, 2013) and how they used Craigslist's sex forums to seek sex based on racial and gendered cultural logics (Robinson & Vidal-Ortiz, 2013). Even scholars of news economics began to take notice of Craigslist's role in diminishing newspaper advertising (Seamans & Zhu, 2013). To date, Craigslist research has remained attentive to the uses of Craigslist for LGBTQ people and as a hookup site. No work has yet examined reportage about Craigslist sex forums nor has it investigated the impacts of ideologies about sex on Craigslist users' sexual self-expression.

### **Theory: Social Construction, Media, and Sexuality**

This dissertation is foremost concerned with sexual subjects as they are constructed through normalizing judgment and news ideology — whether in mainstream newspapers, alternative newspapers, or online sex forums. One might simply define subjectivity as the process of becoming an individual and of being an individual in culture. The sexual subject is a product of discourse, “a group of statements which provide language for talking about — a way of representing knowledge about — a particular topic at a particular historical moment” (Foucault, 1974, as cited in Hall, 1992). In their book *Framing the Sexual Subject*, Richard Parker, Maria Barbosa, and Peter Aggleton define the sexual subject as “both the *subject matter* for politically committed investigation and the *subject-agent* for social and political change” (Parker, Barbosa, and Aggleton, 2000, p. 3). Their explication expanded upon previous definitions of the subject, as theorized by Louis Althusser. Althusser (1971) argued that

language produces subjects, insofar that ideological apparatuses (i.e. culture and mass media) condition people to believe they have consciousness and agency. So agency is only a fallacy. Within a mass media system, identities are shaped by ideological forces, including the ideological apparatuses called mass media. Because ideology and media fundamentally influence who we are, people are “always-already” subjects of ideology (Althusser, 1971). When the concept of the subject is applied to specific attributes of identity, such as sexuality and gender, scholars examine how identity and subjectivity intersect. Judith Butler argued that bodies are restrained and constructed by culture, in that “to the extent that norms operate as psychic phenomena, restricting and producing desire, they also govern the formation of the subject and circumscribe the domain of livable sociality” (Butler, 1997, p. 21).

This dissertation traces the development of a particular sexual subject: The deviant author of sexual personal ads, and specifically the sexual deviant on Craigslist. By drawing on theorists of subjectivity as well as cultural studies scholars such as Stuart Hall, we can begin to understand how and why the normalizing gazes of social science and mass media help shape discourse about sexuality and personal ads. We must ask ourselves not only who the subjects of mediated representations are, but what words are used to describe them, what descriptions are eliminated, what identities become acceptable through representation, and which are symbolically annihilated (see Tuchman, 1978b). To make sense of patterns in discourse, I also draw on scholars of racial identity and media hegemony, who have theorized the role of mass media in maintaining marginalized people’s subject-positions, and who have called for scholarship on self-representation and its potential for counter-hegemonic knowledge production.

**Representation and the circuit of culture.** Chief among the representational scholars was Stuart Hall, the cultural theorist and director of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. For Hall, “representation means using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent, the world meaningfully, to other people” (Hall, 1997, p. 15). But representation is not merely the system of language and symbols used to describe our perceived reality. Rather, representation is a system of sensemaking — a “shared conceptual map” (Hall, 1997, p. 18) embedded in language and used to order and taxonomize existence. Hall and his contemporaries understood representations as social constructions, arguing that representation creates meaning and reflects ideology in culture. Representation helps shape our understanding of the world as much as our experiences of the world shape representations. For this reason, representation is not fixed, and different cultures encode and decode different meanings into their respective representational systems (Hall, 1997). Like sexual scripts (see Gagnon, 1990b), representation is local to histories and cultures, and is constitutive of discourse.

So why does representation matter to a study of Craigslist sex forums in the news? By analyzing representations as cultural artifacts, scholars can decode a culture’s discursive formations (the “conceptual map”), which are rife with cultural norms, cultural values, and cultural phobias. By relying on representational theory, scholars can “read” a culture through its communicative acts. Constructivists choose to analyze “the production and circulation of meaning through language” (Hall, 1997, p. 1). Cultural studies scholars argue that representation is a key step in the circuit of culture (DuGay et al, 1997), a metaphor for the circulation of meaning among populations. In the circuit of culture, representation interplays equally with other factors such as identity, production, regulation, and consumption to comprise culture. The circuit of culture implies that

mediated representations, such as news stories, are affected by the forces of regulation and the limitations of production, and through consumption shape individual identity. Conversely, individuals' identities may be represented in certain ways as an outcome of economic processes such as production and regulation. The circuit of culture metaphor helps constructivist researchers to uncover ideology embedded in headlines, articles, and images published in the news.

**Vernacular media.** Not all representations are produced by mainstream media for mass audiences. Scholars of representation cannot ignore the counter-hegemonic potential of media produced for and by marginalized communities. Counter-hegemony may be activated through representations in two ways: First, through a paradigm shift, in which an outgroup or subculture finds a new form of representation or a new method of knowledge production and develops solidarity around it, bringing it into the forefront (Hamilton, 1997); and second, through vernacular media, or media produced by and for local communities or marginalized groups (Ono & Pham, 2008). Paradigm shifts and vernacular media allow for novel modes of representation that contest the dominant, hegemonic function of mass media. Mainstream media ideology is theorized as being equal to and exemplary of oppression (Ono & Pham, 2008), so it is crucial that scholars of representations identify messages produced in order to challenge dominant ideology. For this reason, I advocate for analysis of vernacular media, which have the potential to produce counter-hegemonic representations.

A study of news messages about Craigslist sex forums could analyze only those articles published in mainstream U.S. newspapers, elucidating meaningful themes related to mass media's normalizing judgment. But that analysis would be limited in its advocacy potential, because it ignores the voices of the oppressed. For this reason, it is

crucial to also analyze themes in news stories about Craigslist and sex published by vernacular sources, defined in this study as LGBTQ and feminist online magazines. Theoretically, we might expect LGBTQ and feminist media to be more sensitive to stories about sexuality and sexual personal ads. However, Ono and Pham (2008) cautioned scholars that vernacular media are not always oppositional. To clarify: Vernacular media may push back against dominant ideologies surrounding, for instance, gender, beauty, sexuality, and identity, but might also reify, amplify, and comply with dominant ideology. Vernacular narratives can be, and often are more complex, but they do not always carry a counter-hegemonic function (Ono & Pham, 2008). In this study, I turn to stories about Craigslist and sexuality published in LGBTQ and feminist online magazines in order to understand how vernacular media define the sexual subject who uses Craigslist to arrange casual sex. I pay close attention to how vernacular discourses converge with and diverge from mainstream news stories about Craigslist sex forums.

**Online media and self-representation.** Analyzing vernacular media helps scholars visualize the marginalized imaginary. On the other hand, vernacular media are subject to many of the same limitations of production, distribution, and regulation that burden the mainstream press. For this reason, a comparative analysis must not limit itself to assessing themes in only mainstream and vernacular media, or other mass media (e.g. newspapers, news websites, magazines, radio, cinema, etc.). Scholars should take the analysis one step further by analyzing self-representations in unfiltered social contexts, such as in online forums or in street protests, where the regulatory function of mass-mediated dissemination does not limit the types of representations presented. Scholars of new media have suggested that the Internet allows for sexual emancipation. Studying online archives may also help scholars sidestep the obvious limits of self-

reported sexuality in research contexts, results of which can be skewed due to fear of researcher bias (Reynolds, 2015). Thus it is crucial that an analysis of discourse produced about Craigslist sex forums investigates discourse produced by Craigslist sex forum users.

Digital media have played a central role in mobilizing sexual subcultures. LGBTQ people were among the Internet's earliest and most savvy adapters, using computer-mediated communication to challenge offline paradigms of hegemonic sexuality. This dissertation intervenes in debates about the role of sexual emancipation online, as well as with the potential implications that cultural ideology has for online-mediated forms of sexual representation. Given that constructivist media theorists posit direct links between ideology, media production, media consumption, and identity formation (see Hall, 1997, and Ono & Pham, 2008), it is crucial that scholars investigate the ways online-mediated sexuality diverges from, and converges with, mass mediated representations of sexual norms and sexual deviance. That is, "precisely because identities are constructed within, not outside discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies." (Hall & DuGay, 1996, p. 4). Most importantly, this dissertation aligns itself with the constructivist political project, arguing not for a media-as-mirror theory of mass communication, in which mass communication replicates "reality" out there, but for mass media as a primary tool for disseminating dominant ideology. Media ideology stigmatizes sexual expression. It actively frames online sex forums as deviant online communities.



## CHAPTER 2

### Critical-Qualitative Discourse Analysis

This project is a call to integrate interpretive methods within mass communication, a field with foundations in quantitative post-positivism. This dissertation advocates for a politically conscious and historically contextualized analysis that also incorporates empirical research. The project is thus interested in identifying subjectivity (identity) and ideology (power structures) as produced within and by media discourse. Scholars working in the critical social sciences are often wary to adhere to a formal set of methods — the fear being that traditional social science methods are prescriptive, rigid, based on pragmatic research needs, and devoid of intertextual and historical context (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). To mediate the competing needs for interpretive flexibility and empirical rigor, I combine methods of critical discourse analysis (CDA) with the formulaic application of diverse qualitative coding methods.

This dissertation's methodology is best understood as a pragmatic synthesis of inductive, ideologically concerned, text-based analysis tools that, when applied in tandem, answer questions about discourse formations. By analyzing discourse inductively and by building theory out of discourse itself, this project contributes to a growing body of scholarship about sexual subjectivity, while remaining essentially critical of the elite institutions that produce and justify knowledge about sexuality, e.g. the academy and journalistic systems. The method I use is distinct from deductive qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2012) and specific models of critical analysis, such as structural linguistics (see van Dijk, 2008a; van Dijk, 2013) or Foucault's genealogy (Foucault,

1977; Foucault, 1978). My method's strengths lie in its flexibility to interpret intertextual patterns of representation while analyzing those patterns' ideological positions with empirical rigor.

### **Discourse Analysis**

Throughout this dissertation, the object of analysis is discourse about and within Craigslist sex forums. Critical discourse analysts understand discourses as the outcomes and antecedents of complex social actions and power relations. Discourses represent the linguistic potentials for discussion of topics at a given moment in history, and they also determine what is not discussable. What is not said becomes a crucial part of the story.

To borrow a definition from the feminist scholar Chris Weedon, discourses:

“... are ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and the relations between them.

Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the ‘nature’ of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern.

Neither the body nor thoughts and feelings have meaning outside their discursive articulation, but the ways in which discourse constitutes the minds and bodies of individuals is always part of a wider network of power relations, often with institutional bases.” (Weedon, 1989).

Discourses are not the outcome of logical, objective, linear, progressive knowledges about certain subjects. Discourses are grounded within contextual

interactions between identity, production, cultural values, social relations, consciousness, and semiology, and they are always historically contingent (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). For Foucault, “the world of speech and desires has known invasions, struggles, plunderings, disguises, ploys” (Foucault, 1978). While the historian searches for the root of a phenomenon, the discourse analyst unpacks its multiplicities and contradictions, eschewing the search for an “origin” (Foucault, 1978).

Discourse analysis should be understood as a critical-descriptive methodology that takes into account the historical and institutional processes that allow for discourses about a subject to develop. Discourse analysis does not seek a finite moment at which a discourse is birthed and metastasizes; it considers the proliferation of other, earlier discourses, which necessarily arose from even more nebulous and rhizomatous histories, politics, and institutions. The formation of discourses could be infinitely traced through the archives of representation. Likewise, their impacts could be traced forward infinitely through daily culture and emerging ways of knowing.

**Critical discourse analysis (CDA).** This dissertation attempts to illustrate the discursive construction of a particular sexual subject: The sexual “deviant” who uses Craigslist to seek sex partners. Many forms of discourse analysis are interested in unearthing “how understanding is produced” in language, and “what identities, activities, relationships, and shared meaning are created through language” (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). This dissertation partners a specific type of discourse analysis known as CDA with qualitative coding. It uses those methods to explore three locations of discourse about Craigslist sex forums: mainstream news coverage, alternative LGBTQ and feminist news

coverage, and self-representations on Craigslist sex forums. It positions mediated knowledges about Craigslist sex forums within historical contexts, then describes trends in Craigslist sex discourse over time and throughout diverse media. By combining CDA and qualitative coding, I evidence the subjects, sources, themes, and topics of Craigslist sex forum discourse since the personal ad forums trickled into news coverage in the early 2000s.

CDA is a methodology for communication analysis that investigates “the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (van Dijk, 2008a). CDA builds on discourse theory by investing in the belief that language is “an integral element of the material social process,” meaning that critical discourse analysts view communicative objects as outcomes and constituents of social practice (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). The philosophy underpinning CDA is thus critical of the capitalist institutions that impact Western ideology, and of the dominant parties that construct Western knowledge. CDA is also necessarily historical. The goal is to identify both the hegemonic structures that shape discourse and the productive outcomes of discourse in determining social structure (Fairclough, 2001).

There is no consensus about a step-by-step method for analyzing power in language, and scholars take different approaches to doing so. However, eight overarching maxims drive CDA:

- “1) CDA addresses social problems,
- 2) power relations are discursive,

- 3) discourse constitutes society and culture,
- 4) discourse does ideological work,
- 5) discourse is historical,
- 6), the link between text and society is mediated,
- 7) discourse analysis is interpretive and explanatory, and
- 8) discourse is a form of social action” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; van Dijk, 2008b).

Norman Fairclough recommended a social scientific method for CDA that:

- 1) identifies a social problem drawing on intertextual elements of the historical archive (see this dissertation’s literature review),
- 2) identifies discursive and semiotic obstacles to resolution of the social problem, including the systems of production, the intertextuality of meanings about the social problem, and the representation of the problem itself,
- 3) considers whether the social order (hegemony) depends on the social problem,
- 4) identifies potential ways past the social obstacle, and
- 5) reflects critically on the analysis itself (Fairclough, 2001).

I follow the recommendations of Fairclough, Wodak, and van Dijk in my analysis.

**CDA and coding.** In order for CDA to be conducted in an empirical manner, and in order for critical discourse scholars to build a more comprehensive methodology, it is crucial to chart the coding methods we employ. It is not enough to articulate *that* we code our research objects using frameworks such as Fairclough’s (2001), nor is it enough to describe *what aspects* of texts we code. We need to describe precisely *how* we code.

Previous CDA research in mass communication has fallen somewhat short of this charge, articulating its methods as the identification of “emergent themes and frames” which “relied on emergent coding” (DeFoster, 2015) or as an initial “first-level” close reading of a text followed by a “second-level” critical analysis (Brabham, 2012). While these interpretive approaches allow for flexibility in terms of coding procedure, their lack of precision requires future mass communication and discourse scholars to parse out an analytical approach should they wish to expand on the original research.

Anabela Carvalho outlined perhaps the most comprehensive analytical framework for CDA as applied to journalistic reportage. In her article “Media(ted) discourse and society: Rethinking the framework of critical discourse analysis,” published in *Journalism Studies*, Carvalho argued that researchers should first conduct a textual analysis of news stories’ organization, objects or themes, social actors, language used, strategies employed, and ideological standpoints followed by a contextual analysis using comparative-synchronic and historical-diachronic strategies (Carvalho, 2008). While Carvalho’s contributions to CDA literature emphasize time and context while providing helpful guidance in terms of research scope and structure, they do not provide a guideline for coding. This dissertation follows Carvalho’s general recommendations to partner textual analysis with contextual analysis. However, I also use explicit coding methods designed to build theory from a body of discourse. I recommend that future scholars adopt a similarly rigorous coding procedure, which they should describe in detail in their methods sections. The following pages will outline specific coding procedures for CDA

based on coding methods outlined in Saldaña's (2015) *Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*.

***Saldaña's qualitative coding methods.*** Before establishing a coding procedure, it is crucial to understand what a code is. According to Saldaña, “a code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldaña, 2015, p. 3). Coding is the act of applying those “essence-capturing” words and phrases to discourse in order to capture the meaningful qualities of the discourse. It is a method that boils down complex texts into their most basic elements in order to describe patterns across them. But coding presents challenges for researchers because it is essentially interpretive. Saldaña asserted that coding is “a heuristic (from the Greek, meaning ‘to discover’) — an exploratory problem-solving technique without specific formulas to follow” (Saldaña, 2015, p. 8).

Many qualitative scholars use diverse, multi-step, iterative coding methods without articulating our research within a particular coding language. We sometimes label our methods as “open coding” or “thematic coding” or “emergent coding” for lack of more descriptive language or a formulaic approach. In his book, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, Saldaña created a taxonomy of coding strategies that qualitative researchers can use to describe their work. He recommended using a diverse, multi-step, iterative coding approach that is similar to grounded theory, in that it begins with open coding, develops categories from those codes, further refines categories into themes, and eventually produces theory after considering the relationships between

codes, categories, and themes (Saldaña, 2015). Coding occurs in two cycles: first cycle, or code development, and second cycle, or code synthesis. Creating codes and categories is a cyclical process completed during and throughout data collection and analysis. The data are “opened up” by concepts emerging from data, meaning that coding provides the basis for theoretical interpretation of the data. In Saldaña’s approach (and quite unlike coding in competing methods of qualitative content analysis (see Schreier, 2012)), coding units are not necessarily relevant to data analysis. That is, coding can be conducted across and between multiple types of text, such as headlines and body copy, or news articles and Craigslist ads. Saldaña’s coding method focuses on identifying and analyzing patterns throughout a body of discourse, not within like units of text. In this dissertation, qualitative coding is put in the service of critical-interpretive theories of discourse, leaving behind normative assumptions about the observable nature of reality, instead opting for a politically motivated, constructivist framework for analysis based on CDA (Ritsert, 1972; Schreier, 2012; Vorderer & Groeben, 1987).

***First-cycle coding methods.*** In *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, Saldaña identified dozens of coding methods that can be used during both first- and second-cycle coding. To reiterate, first-cycle coding is the initial, emergent, interpretative process involved in codebook development. This dissertation uses an eclectic first-cycle coding procedure. According to Saldaña, eclectic coding “could be considered a form of open coding;” its chief characteristic is that it “employs a select and compatible combination” of first-cycle coding methods that allow for interpretation of discourse (Saldaña, 2015). This dissertation’s first-cycle methods follow a four-step process, during



which I conduct (in order): attribute coding, holistic / simultaneous coding, descriptive coding, and values / versus coding. Coding definitions are drawn from *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*:

1) *Attribute coding*. Attribute coding is a pre-coding process that occurs before in-depth textual analysis. In this coding method, descriptive attributes of the data are systematically noted in a spreadsheet for qualitative and quantitative analysis. Notation includes “basic descriptive information such as: the fieldwork setting, participant characteristics or demographics, data format, time frame, and other variables of interest” (Saldaña, 2015, p. 70) I coded descriptive attributes of the data, such as publication titles, publication dates, article headlines, or ad headlines, while selecting relevant news articles and Craigslist posts for analysis.

2) *Holistic coding*. Holistic coding is a type of thematic analysis that describes a piece of discourse as a whole rather than analyzing it at the sentence or word level. Saldaña (2015) calls holistic coding a “preparatory approach to a unit of data before a more detailed coding or categorization process” is conducted (p. 142). After conducting attribute coding for each selected news article or Craigslist post, I coded for the presence of one or two dominant themes. Holistic coding is similar to framing analysis in mass communication research. It occurs after attribute coding but before the other, more nuanced, first-cycle methods.

3) *Simultaneous coding*. Simultaneous coding is “the application of two or more different codes to a single qualitative datum, or the overlapped occurrence of two or more codes applied to sequential units of qualitative data” (Saldaña, 2015, p. 80). This is

common enough in qualitative analysis that many scholars do not go out of their way to describe it as a particular coding strategy. But I should note that many of the news articles and Craigslist posts in my sample were given more than one holistic code, and are thus coded simultaneously. This is consistent with a postmodern, constructivist approach to language, which understands meaning as myriad and does not try to deduce an essential nature from bodies of discourse.

4) *Descriptive coding*. Descriptive coding describes the topics of certain units of discourse — “what is talked or written about” (Wolcott, 1994, p. 119.) It is often the first step in getting intimate with the problems of a study, and it is also essential for longitudinal analysis, according to Saldaña (2015, p. 71). In this study, I used descriptive codes to identify more detailed units of discourse than in the holistic coding step. I used descriptive coding to identify subjects of discourse. Subjects identified in this dissertation included individuals spoken about, specific themes in news coverage or Craigslist ads, and events that elicit news coverage. Saldaña suggested that most qualitative researchers naturally conduct descriptive coding as they get to know their data.

5) *Values coding*. Values coding accounts for “perspectives or worldview” present in the text. All ideologically concerned analysts therefore engage in a type of values coding. In fact it would be theoretically impossible to conduct critical-empirical research without using values coding. According to Saldaña, “values coding is appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies, but particularly for those that explore cultural values, identity, intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences, etc.” (p. 111). I conduct values coding to illustrate certain biases in news coverage of Craigslist sex

forums, such as misogyny, feminism, sexual normativity, racism, and other forms of explicit political speech accounted for in discourse. I conducted values coding alongside descriptive coding to provide more nuanced insights into the construction of ideology surrounding news sources and news subjects described in certain media discourses (i.e. mainstream newspapers, alternative news, or Craigslist sex forums).

6) *Versus coding*. To further illustrate ideology in news content and Craigslist posts, this dissertation builds upon descriptive coding and values coding by using versus coding. Versus coding is a type of dichotomous coding used to identify “individuals, groups, social systems, organizations, phenomena, processes, concepts, etc., in direct conflict with one another” (Saldaña, 2015, p. 115). While descriptive coding might identify “anti-prostitution laws” in news articles about Craigslist sex forums, and values coding might identify “conservative policy,” for instance, versus coding might result in a “police vs. sex workers” code in the same story. In this dissertation, versus coding is used to identify the very real people and policies producing certain ideologies in media discourse. This method is particularly suited to “critical discourse analysis, and qualitative data sets that suggest strong conflicts or competing goals within, among, and between participants” (Saldaña, 2015, p. 115)

In sum, this dissertation used eclectic coding, a type of open coding, as its first-cycle method. I first used attribute coding as a pre-coding method to document the date of news article publication or the date of Craigslist posts, the name of the publication or forum type, and whether the news article or Craigslist post meet selection criteria. If articles and posts meet the selection criteria, I conducted a more in-depth textual analysis

using holistic coding followed by descriptive coding, values coding, and versus coding. This method was used for analysis of mainstream news articles, alternative news articles, and Craigslist forum posts in this dissertation.

***Second-cycle coding methods.*** Second-cycle coding is a synthesis procedure that occurs after first-cycle coding as needed to build theory. Second-cycle methods “are advanced ways of reorganizing and reanalyzing data coded through First Cycle methods,” and their primary utility “is to develop a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual, and/or theoretical organization” from those earlier developed codes (Saldaña, 2015, p. 149). I combined two types of second-cycle coding to make thematic links and time-based-conclusions about each type of media discourse analyzed: mainstream news, alternative online magazines, and Craigslist sex forum posts. This strategy corresponds with Carvalho’s (2008) recommendations to conduct CDA using a contextual, historically grounded approach. I used pattern coding and longitudinal coding in the second phase of my analysis. These definitions are again borrowed from *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*:

1) *Pattern coding.* Pattern coding corresponds with axial coding in grounded theory. After examining the first-cycle codes for each medium sampled in this dissertation, I looked for meanings that could cohere into themes and patterns. Pattern codes “pull together a lot of material into a more meaningful and parsimonious unit of analysis” (Saldaña, 2015) to describe a phenomenon occurring within discourse. This stage of analysis requires significant critical thinking and synthesis of patterns that developed during first-cycle coding.

2) *Longitudinal coding*. Longitudinal coding is a constructivist approach to coding that acknowledges the instability of discourse. While pattern coding can help surface trends in discourse as a whole, longitudinal coding can evidence changes in discourse over time. Saldaña writes that “studies in identity lend themselves to this method since identity is conceptualized as a fluid rather than static construct” (Saldaña, 2015). Identity (or subjectivity) as it is constructed by mass media is a central concept investigated in this dissertation. Saldaña notes that CDA necessitates longitudinal coding because it is invested in the constructivist project of tracing discourse as it evolves from previous discourses and transforms into future ways of knowing.

### **Methods by Chapter**

Although each chapter in my dissertation followed roughly the coding procedure described in previous pages, there were significant differences between the chapters in terms of sample size, availability of data, attributes of data sampled, etc. Each chapter includes in its introduction a detailed description of the research questions and pre-coding, first-cycle coding, and second-cycle coding methods used. However, to aid readers’ entry into the analyses, I will briefly describe the samples used and the theoretical approaches that drove each investigation.

Chapter 3 focuses on mainstream newspaper discourses about Craigslist sex forums since 2003, when Craigslist expanded from San Francisco to other U.S. cities. In this chapter, I looked specifically for examples of dominant ideology, guided by the philosophy that mainstream news sources replicate cultural ideals (see Althusser, 1971, and Gramsci, 1971). To do so, I sampled a census of 624 articles published between 2003

and 2016 that matched keyword searches for “Craigslis and sex” and “Craigslis and Casual Encounters” from seven of the ten highest-circulation U.S. newspapers archived by ProQuest. The sample was further refined to 280 particularly salient articles during pre-coding and attribute coding. I determined an article’s relevance to the study based on two criteria: the primacy of Craigslis forums to the story and the primacy of sex, sexuality, or gender identity to the story. I selected full news stories that made a meaningful contribution to discourse about Craigslis sex forums, deleting duplicates, news roundups (aggregated headlines) and sidebars. Those articles were sampled from the *Chicago Tribune* ( $n = 80$ ); *The Denver Post* ( $n = 10$ ); the *Los Angeles Times* ( $n = 50$ ); *The New York Times* ( $n = 55$ ); *USA Today* ( $n = 8$ ); *The Wall Street Journal* ( $n = 12$ ); and *The Washington Post* ( $n = 65$ ). I used the first and second-cycle coding methods outlined in the previous section to illustrate themes in coverage, topics of discourse, values embedded in news stories, and tensions between discourse subjects.

In Chapter 4, I turned my focus to alternative news. Scholars of race and media have especially argued for increased attention to media made for and by minorities, and for analysis of self-representations (Ono & Pham, 2008). Using the same methods and time frame as described for Chapter 3, I sampled 193 articles matching keyword searches for “Craigslis and sex” and “Craigslis and Casual Encounters” from the websites of six alternative online magazines. The sample was further refined to 130 particularly salient articles during the pre-coding process described above as attribute coding. Articles were sampled from the LGBTQ outlets *The Advocate* ( $n = 57$ ), Out.com ( $n = 21$ ), and Pride.com ( $n = 7$ ), and the feminist publications *Bitch* ( $n = 17$ ), *Feministing* ( $n = 16$ ), and

*Ms.* magazine ( $n = 12$ ). I used first- and second-cycle coding methods to illustrate themes in coverage, topics of discourse, values embedded in news stories, and tensions between discourse subjects. Based on theories of self-representation (see Hall, 1997, and Ono and Pham, 2009), LGBTQ and feminist news sites may include more complex representations of Craigslist sex than mainstream newspapers. Chapter 4 expands on the news discourse analysis described in Chapter 3 by investigating potential resistant themes in coverage, differences in sources or “authorized knowers” used in stories (see Schudson, 2003), and the discursive positioning of news subjects.

For Chapter 5, I interpreted the acronym-heavy, slang-laden language of Craigslist’s sex forums in order to understand how normative ideology about sex might cohere with or diverge from self-representations of sexuality. Based on theories of cybersexuality, analysts might expect Craigslist to be a space for counter-hegemonic performance of sexual identity, because “within the safe cyberspaces of the Internet, identities can be shaped, tested, and transformed” (Gudelunas, 2005; Woodland, 2000). I used the Internet Archive’s Wayback Machine to sample Casual Encounters headlines and body content from personal ads posted in Chicago ( $n = 98$ ), Los Angeles ( $n = 100$ ), and New York City ( $n = 100$ ) between 2003 and 2016. I used first and second-cycle coding methods to illustrate themes in personal ad content, topics of discourse, values embedded in personal ads, and tensions between discourse subjects. Crucially, this chapter highlights the story news media leave out: that Casual Encounters forums are productive spaces for exploring sexual identity, but that they are also rife with judgments, normalizations, and paranoias common to quotidian offline interactions in culture.

## **Outcomes and Theory development**

After conducting first and second-cycle coding for mainstream news articles about Craigslist sex forums, stories about Craigslist sex forums in LGBTQ and feminist online magazines, and posts on Craigslist sex forums, I approached the final round of theory building. I synthesized the theories and assertions developed in each empirical analysis to make final conclusions about the nature of Craigslist sex discourse across time and throughout different media. I did this by applying second-round coding methods of pattern coding and longitudinal coding. This dissertation used a constant comparative method for CDA and qualitative coding that analyzes intertextual meaning and culminates in theory development. A schematic for the coding procedure appears in Figure 1.

This dissertation closes by returning to the theories described in Chapter 1. I link historical perspectives on sexuality studies and news sociology described in Chapter 1 with the normalizing gaze of Craigslist sex coverage evidenced by Chapters 3 and 4, then I trace those ideologies into the self-representational spaces defined in Chapter 5. This dissertation illustrates the discursive development of a deviant sexual subject who uses online advertising to seek casual sex.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **U.S. Newspaper Coverage of Craigslist Sex Forums, 2003 - 2016**

High-circulation U.S. newspapers in this sample began covering Craigslist sex forums in late 2003. Craigslist had only entered the online marketplace three years earlier, when at the turn of the millennium CEO Craig Newmark launched the site as a San Francisco community forum (Craigslist, 2016). But within a few years, popular media developed a particular interest in Craigslist's romantic and sexual services. Early stories represented Craigslist as a place to find a blind date. By 2007, however, coverage took on a lascivious tone. Craigslist became known as a harbor for the Internet's loathsome subjects: prostitutes and pimps, child sex workers, sex traffickers, murderers, rapists, drug dealers, gang members, and promiscuous gay men. This chapter untangles why and how Craigslist was defined as a digital gathering place for these sexual Others. It decodes the ideologies embedded within representations of Craigslist sex forums in U.S. news. Above all, this chapter traces trends in discourse longitudinally by digging back into Craigslist sex forum coverage since 2003 and following it into the present.

To accomplish these goals, I begin by tracking how newspapers described Craigslist's reputation for their readers, and how they framed the sex forums specifically. This provides an overview of trends in coverage by breaking down the ways newspaper reporters explicitly described Craigslist when reporting on the site. The chapter continues by describing seven primary themes in news coverage that emerged during pattern coding of the newspaper sample: Sex Crimes and Sex Work, Law and Regulation, Scandal,

Online Dating Culture, Business & Economy, Public Health, and Related Media. These primary themes link topics that emerged in the qualitative newspaper content analysis back to ideological concerns and linguistic patterns related to normalizing judgment. News sources and sexual subjects are also described within each section of the findings. News sources included, for instance, lawmakers, police officers, technology executives, and less commonly sex workers, trafficking victims, public health administrators, and researchers. Sexual subjects included prostitutes and pimps, trafficking victims and child sex workers, politicians and other high-profile public figures, various criminals, social outsiders and marginalized communities, and risk groups for STIs and HIV, such as gay men. This chapter describes how Craigslist sex forums have been spoken about in mainstream U.S. newspapers, with attention given to which social actors are described, by whom, and in whose ideological interests.

Throughout this chapter, I provide evidence for news topics, news sources, and news subjects by quoting language from articles published in the newspaper sample. I first outline Craigslist's reputation as reported by mainstream newspapers, explaining discourse development in chronological order. The section about Craigslist's reputation in the news is especially concerned with establishing normalizing judgment in news discourse. I then describe story topics by their prominence in the sample. The date of publication, story title, and news source are provided alongside each quotation, as is any contextual information necessary for understanding the meaning of the quoted news content. Although the goal of this dissertation is to illustrate longitudinal trends in

discourse using qualitative methodologies, quantitative findings are interspersed in the text when they help to illustrate trends in content.

In total, I coded and analyzed themes in 280 U.S. news articles published about Craigslist sex forums between 2003 and 2016. The articles were sampled from seven of the ten highest-circulation U.S. newspapers (see Table 1). They were coded by year of appearance within the sampled timeframe in clusters based on turns in discourse that occurred during each unit of analysis (see Table 2). Coding was conducted in NVivo. I used the first- and second-cycle coding procedure outlined in Chapter 2.

## **Reputation**

**2003 - 2007.** Early instances of Craigslist sex forum coverage in national newspapers focused on Craigslist's reputation as a perfectly normal, if unreliable, place to meet sex partners. Wrote a columnist for the *Washington Post* about Craigslist in the earliest story in the sample: "Reputation: The T.J. Maxx of dating sites — no fees, no photos, no fancy graphics, but some hidden gems" ("Find a Date Online, Part 1," Dec. 14 2003, *Washington Post*). This sentence's tone hinted at some minor trepidations regarding Craigslist's perceived dating pool quality, but the review was generally positive. By 2004, a reporter from *USA Today* described Craigslist as "a bit like an old general store" and like "a neighborhood bulletin board." In terms of the site's content, he wrote: "Job listings! Housing ads! Sex! My favorite is the free-things section. (A warning: The sex is not always free.)" ("Craigslist Makes A-List: Check it Twice (or so)," Oct. 20, 2004, *USA Today*). This article is the first in the sample to imply that Craigslist might be a hub for sex work. Early stories did not yet suggest that Craigslist

forums were nefarious breeding grounds for illegal activity. Rather they reported that Craigslist present complications common to many online communities. Wrote a reporter for the *Chicago Tribune*:

“Still, Craigslist has the same problem that other Internet dating services have, according to some former online daters—that is, potential soul mates aren't screened. ‘You just don't know if they are who they say they are,’ said Shawna Roongsang, a Chicago-area resident who compares meeting men on the Internet to hooking up with someone at a bar.” (“Bloom falls off the rose for Internet matchups; Consumers' willingness to pay for online personal ads appears to have peaked, and traditional dating services are enjoying new growth,” Feb. 14, 2005, *Chicago Tribune*).

Such frustrations, which are common in today's online dating culture, were also prevalent more than a decade ago. It's not clear who you're meeting when you arrange a date online. And it's equally unclear what your date's social background might be. Beginning in 2007, news stories began to describe racial tensions and blatant misogyny, as in one article from the *Denver Post*:

“The dirty little secret about the wildly popular Craigslist is that one click away from its home page are some raunchy and often deeply offensive forums inviting blatant racism, rants and sexual kinks. Just below the better-known free classifieds for housing, goods and services, the 'discussion forums' frequently descend to exchanges of racial and homophobic epithets, sexual fantasies or bad-

driver diatribes.” (“Racism, misogyny, homophobia — the dark side of Craigslist,” Dec. 4, 2007, *Denver Post*)

But it wasn’t just bigotry and anonymity that created tensions in Craigslist discourse. In 2007, newspapers added concerns about illegal drugs to the editorial mix. A mid-year piece in the *Chicago Tribune* recognized that it was not just drugs that plagued Craigslist’s sex forums, but sex and drugs being sold alongside one another – a particularly seductive combination. One reporter wrote: “Illegal drugs are not the most nefarious things being peddled on Craigslist. Police around the country have used Craigslist to investigate and bust prostitution” (“INTERNET drug hookups; Cocaine plagues New York, heroin plagues Chicago — and users seem all too willing to spread the disease,” June 28, 2007, *Chicago Tribune*)

**2008 - 2009.** Between 2008 and 2009, news about Craigslist sex forums peaked. Discourse surrounding Craigslist became firmly embedded in journalistic writing, and news coverage suggested the site’s popularity had increased substantially. According to statistics published in April 2009 by the Pew Research Center, Craigslist was the most popular website in the nation at that time. Reported the media analysis website MarketingCharts.com: “In March 2009, classified sites averaged 53.8 million unique visitors, up 7% from February. Of these visitors, Craigslist had 42.2 million uniques. As of April 2009, Craigslist had established itself in more than 500 cities across 50 different countries,” (Marketing Charts, 2009). Coverage of the era played up different niche communities that had caught on to Craigslist’s entertainment value or its utility for crime fighting and public health. For instance, by 2008, Craigslist forums enjoyed a particularly

favorable reputation among LGBTQ people. However, even during these early years of Craigslist coverage by the mainstream press, Craigslist was pegged as a novelty or as a place to arrange casual sex rather than as a serious contender for a dating site.

Acknowledging Craigslist's shock factor and its blatant misogyny, a reporter wrote for the *Chicago Tribune*:

"I would recommend it more for the entertainment value than actually using it to meet girls. Visit the Women Seeking Women site and you'll see a few earnest women looking to connect with other women for an innocent evening of cappuccino — but you'll find a lot more ads posted by women looking for sexy time." ("Not all dating sites are created equal," March 14, 2008, *Chicago Tribune*)

In 2008, newspaper reporters identified another community of interest to Craigslist sex coverage. By that time, police had caught wind of sex work occurring on the site. Police began to surveil Craigslist's local pages, looking not just for prostitutes, but for johns — the men who seek sex in exchange for money — online. In the eyes of journalists, Craigslist's impact on the underground sex economy was so prolific that writers began referring to the Internet as the *primary* avenue for exchanging sex and money. A police reporter for the *Los Angeles Times* quoted a police captain as saying: "I kind of think of Craigslist as the pimp," The reporter followed: "That's one way to look at it. On the other hand, Craigslist and other sites are providing thousands of good leads to cops, and maybe helping to expose sociopaths" ("Today's red-light district is online," March 16, 2008, *Los Angeles Times*). Craigslist's sex economy had become a threat to public wellbeing in the eyes of police, but Craigslist also provided a covert window into

illegal activity unavailable to law enforcement officials through other technologies or on-the-ground policing. Journalists reported on Craigslist because it was caught in the news net with other crime stories spurred from the police beat.

By 2009, news framing shifted from Craigslist as a curiosity and social ill to Craigslist as an explicit risk to life and public health. Popular news coverage about Craigslist abounded, and discourse tilted toward explicit fears over sex work, sex trafficking, sexual assault, and violent crime. In March 2009, a Chicago-area sheriff sued Craigslist in a federal court case, alleging that Craigslist's Erotic Services section, a personal ad forum for people seeking sexual encounters, was "a public nuisance that knowingly facilitates prostitution" and is "the largest source of prostitution in America" ("Craigslist sued for prostitution ads," March 6, 2009, *Chicago Tribune*). A *New York Times* briefing from the same day quoted the plaintiff: "'Missing children, runaways, abused women and women trafficked in from foreign countries are routinely forced to have sex with strangers because they're being pimped on Craigslist,' Sheriff Dart said" ("Illinois: Sheriff sues Craigslist," March 6, 2009, *The New York Times*).

The stories published in subsequent months became even more sordid. Alongside attention given to Craigslist's impersonal matchmaking strategies were scathing stories that solidified Craigslist's utility for violent criminals, not just run-of-the-mill pimps and prostitutes. News of a so-called "Craigslist Killer" broke in April 2009, when three Boston-area sex workers were assaulted at gunpoint and murdered in hotels in similarly-orchestrated attacks. The suspect, described in reports as "tall, blond and clean cut," raised public suspicions about online safety and citizens' abilities to detect coldblooded

killers among the milieu of everyday perverts perusing Craigslist. Even Craigslist's chief executive officer, Jim Buckmaster, weighed in on the case:

“‘There appears to be a psychopath on the loose in the Boston area, and we will of course do everything in our power to assist law enforcement in apprehending the perpetrator as soon as possible,’ Mr. Buckmaster said. ‘We are evaluating this incident to see if there are any additional things we could do to better protect Craigslist users.’” (“Links seen among attacks on three women in hotels,” April 18, 2009, *The New York Times*).

The cautionary gave way to paranoia in the wake of the Boston “Craigslist Killer” coverage. A *New York Times* article published the following day described a divorcee’s ultimately benign encounter with a sex partner he met on Craigslist. The story’s first line was ominous: “THIS is it, Melvin thought: Craigslist is about to get me killed.” (“Recklessly seeking sex on Craigslist,” April 19, 2009, *New York Times*). A cultural phobia about online sexuality had officially registered, fanned by legislative pressure for Craigslist to remove its Adult Services forums, which Craigslist introduced in spring 2009 as a replacement for the Erotic Services category. A *Los Angeles Times* article from May 2009 linked the Craigslist Killer with mounting concerns over digital sexuality:

“Law enforcement officials have often complained about the ease with which prostitutes and their clients can arrange encounters on Craigslist. But officials have stepped up their criticism since the slaying of masseuse Julissa Brisman, whose body was found April 14 in a Boston hotel. Police say the killer found her through a Craigslist ad.” (“INTERNET; States want erotic ads off Craigslist;



Attorneys general say the website hasn't done enough to stop the posting of ads for prostitution,” May 11, 2009, *Los Angeles Times*).

And while stories like those about the Craigslist Killer capitalized on fears about online dating, the sex industry, and violent crime, others tried to quell concerns that Craigslist hosts particularly prolific sociopaths. Wrote one *Chicago Tribune* contributor in reference to Craigslist’s surveillance efforts, which were put in place as a response to both the Craigslist Killer and Chicago Sheriff Dart’s lawsuit against Craigslist:

— “There's no difference between using Craigslist or your local bar to troll for sex — except Craigslist is being singled out because it's on the big, scary Internet.

Lawmakers fear the Web more than they understand it. ... The world will be no safer now that Craigslist is deleting their hookup ads; there are still a zillion cyberspace and real-world locales for you to find other sexual adventurers. Just watch yourself if you choose to go down that road.” (“Hot & horny & looking for ...,” May 15, 2009, *Chicago Tribune*)

**2010 - 2011.** Despite journalistic critiques of sensationalized coverage, the trend of newspaper trepidation toward Craigslist’s sex forums continued into the early 2010s. But discourse started to expand to describe more meta-level concerns about the Internet and society. Newspapers across the country still covered Craigslist in terms of its seedy community members, but they diversified coverage to include Craigslist’s economic morality, its implications for the First Amendment and Internet anonymity, and its continued impact on black markets for drugs and sex work. An early 2010 story from the *Los Angeles Times*, for instance, included that “Craigslist's popularity and breadth make

it attractive to the seamy elements of society, as well as to fringe groups of all types.” (“Craigslist and crime,” Jan. 12, 2010, *Los Angeles Times*) On the other hand, writers suggested that sex work was the primary problem. The following *Wall Street Journal* story was the first in the sample to articulate Craigslist’s smorgasbord of sex forums, including those for online dating as well as long-term romances, casual sex, and unrequited love notes. As the 2000s wore on, Craigslist’s portfolio of forums diversified as did its consumer market. Wrote the reporter:

“Craigslist, of course, has now industrialized the personals business, becoming a massive online clearinghouse of women seeking women, women seeking men, men seeking men, men seeking women, ‘misc romance,’ ‘casual encounters’ and ‘missed connections.’ Cupid, it appears, now works at the Chicago Board of Trade.” (“Lonely Hearts, Of Like Minds,” Jan. 25, 2010, *Wall Street Journal*)

That same the year, the *Washington Post* published an article responding to Craigslist’s battles against legislators’ concerned with sex trafficking. While pointing out Craigslist’s more pedestrian uses, the story also upheld Craigslist as a figurehead of the First Amendment. Journalists seemed surprised that Craigslist would yield to pressure from the moral authorities:

“(The decision to remove Adult Services) is the first of its kind for a company that has become not only a place to buy used furniture and find apartments, but also a symbol of a free-speech, no-limit Internet. Craigslist yielded to the complaints of advocacy groups who say the firm’s Web sites are being widely

used in the global sex trade of women and children.” (“Adult ads permanently off U.S. sites, Craigslist says,” Sept. 16, 2010, *Washington Post*)

A great national media discussion about Internet regulation ensued. At the center of the debates were Craigslist’s Erotic Services forums, which were removed from Craigslist and replaced with a similar but less explicit Adult Services forum in autumn 2009.

(While Erotic Services flagrantly advertised sex work, Adult Services was supposed to be less explicit). However, the Adult Services forum was taken down in 2010, with Craigslist bowing to pressure from attorneys general across the country. Wrote a reporter for the *Los Angeles Times* after Craigslist very publicly replaced Adult Services with a bold, black “Censored” bar:

“After trying to find more ways to make the section less hospitable to the sex trade, Craigslist decided instead to close it on Sept. 3. That's a mixed blessing. The adult services section gave prostitutes and their customers a convenient way to find each other, making it easier for those crimes to be committed. Keeping it open may have endeared Craigslist to libertines and libertarians, but it was corrosive to the company's reputation. There also was the risk that the anti-Craigslist fervor would prompt lawmakers to remove the legal shield that protects sites against liability for third-party content. Such a change would stifle not just Craigslist but also EBay, Google, Yahoo and much of the rest of the online world.” (“A less-sexy Craigslist,” Sept. 18, 2010, *Los Angeles Times*).

Although Craigslist removed Erotic Services in 2009 and its replacement, Adult Services, in the fall of 2010, follow-up coverage continued through the spring of 2011. The

removal of the Adult Services forum was reported as “a victory of sorts for authorities who claimed the popular website was a haven for sex workers, johns and even human traffickers.” (“Old profession, new websites,” April 21, 2011, *Chicago Tribune*)

**2012 - 2013.** While Internet regulation and First Amendment rights occupied a certain corner of news discourse, Craigslist’s reputation for depravity continued to be the hottest topic for coverage. Public health became a concern for researchers who began to view Craigslist as a mediator for sexually transmitted infections and diseases such as HIV/AIDS. Scholars supported paranoias about casual sex orchestrated online, pointing to Craigslist as a primary catalyst for poor sexual health. Wrote a reporter for the *Washington Post* in spring 2012:

“According to researchers at New York University's Stern School of Business, the site also provides easy access to something way less cool: sexually transmitted diseases. ‘The entry of Craigslist produces a transformative shift in casual sex-seeking behavior,’ Jason Chan and Anindya Ghose write in ‘Internet's Dirty Secret: Assessing the Impact of Technology Shocks on the Outbreaks of Sexually Transmitted Diseases.’ The authors link the site to a 14 percent increase in the rate of new AIDS cases, or more than 6,500 new infections each year, and a similar increase in syphilis infections. ‘The ease of seeking sex partners through Craigslist's personal ad listings [has] brought a culture of sexual openness to the younger generation not seen since the seventies,’ they write.” (“What’s the big idea?” April 15, 2012, *Washington Post*)

**2014 - 2016.** Stories perpetuating fear surrounding Craigslist sex forums have

slowed in recent years, perhaps because the novelty of Internet-mediated sexuality has begun to wear off . While a handful of stories in 2014 and 2015 continued to report on sex work, prostitution stings, rape cases, and sexual assaults arranged through Craigslist, a counter-discourse about Craigslist also developed. Louder voices emerged in support of online dating, online sexuality, and the like. In a *Washington Post* editorial, Christian Rudder, the president of the online dating site OkCupid, rebuked the old ways of understanding Internet-mediated intimacy. “Once upon a time, online daters were mocked as lonely losers, or worse,” Rudder wrote. “Not anymore.” He went on to poke holes in stereotypes about online communities, including a previous panic about Craigslist killers. In a first-person essay about online dating myths, he wrote:

“Grim stories abound. In 2010, Boston's "Craigslist killer" was charged with murdering a woman he had met online (he later committed suicide in jail). In 2013, Mary Kay Beckman sued Match.com for \$10 million after a man she met on the site came to her Las Vegas home with a knife and an intent to kill. But despite the occasional bad press, the numbers suggest that online dating is very safe. OkCupid creates something like 30,000 first dates every day, and complaints about dangerous meetings are extremely rare. I remember only a handful in my 12 years at the company. Although there are no comprehensive numbers, executives with other sites report similarly low levels of abuse. Additionally, dating sites have taken steps to respond to concerns. Match.com, for example, now checks its users against the National Sex Offender Registry and deletes the profiles of anyone found on the list.” (“Online dating,” Oct. 4, 2015, *Washington Post*)

Rudder's attempts to assuage concerns about safety in online dating and online sex communities were bolstered by a 2016 *Los Angeles Times* editorial titled "Online ads for sex aren't 'trafficking.'" The article led with criticism of police units that used Craigslist to arrest 570 sex workers and their clients in the weeks surrounding that year's Super Bowl in the San Francisco Bay Area. Writing in defense of sex workers' rights, the author claimed that:

"These closures represent a crusade to stamp out online advertising for sex workers. But that's not how law enforcement portrays it. They claim to be fighting sex trafficking, which federal law defines as the recruitment, harboring, transportation or obtaining of a person for commercial sex through the use of force, fraud or coercion." ("Online ads for sex aren't 'trafficking,'" Feb. 17, 2016, *Los Angeles Times*.)

The *Los Angeles Times* editorial was the most recent story published in the newspaper sample. It was one of the few U.S. newspaper articles to defend sex workers' rights, and it was one of even fewer to criticize policing strategies that utilized Craigslist. The story represents a continuing shift in discourse toward increased acceptance of marginalized sexual communities. Reporters have begun covering Craigslist sex forums as gathering spaces for LGBTQ people and sex workers – a shift that finally attempts to remove stigma from Craigslist sex forums and the people who use them.

In the following section, I go into further depth by breaking down topical themes in Craigslist sex coverage. I start by outlining general topics at the news framing (or

holistic) level, then I proceed with a detailed analysis of Craigslist coverage at the paragraph and sentence level.

### **Story Topics**

Story topics in the high-circulation newspaper sample fit into seven categories: Sex Crimes and Sex Work, Law and Regulation, Scandal, Online Dating Culture, Business & Economy, Public Health, and Related Media. These topics were determined through holistic coding, which describes a unit of discourse as a whole rather than at the sentence or word level (Saldaña, 2015). Themes (or holistic codes) represent the topical coverage of each entire news story in the sample. Critics of compartmentalized coding processes such as holistic coding may argue that news topics are not mutually exclusive, and that a story about law and regulation, for instance, may also be about sex crimes. In order to avoid reductionism, I followed a specific protocol for establishing holistic codes. When there was ambiguity about the topic of news coverage, I returned to story's title and lede. That is, I determined story topics based on journalistic framing of the news story. Story topic frequencies are detailed in Table 3.

Table 3 shows that sex crimes and sex work made up the majority of Craigslist sex forum coverage (50%), followed by law and regulation (19.3%) scandal (12.1%), and online dating culture (10.7%). Sex crime and sex work stories included articles about prostitution and pimping, rape and sexual assault, police stings against sex workers, sex trafficking, and the like. Law and regulation articles described legal concerns about online sex forums, formal legislative actions against Craigslist, regulation and surveillance of Craigslist's sex forums, concerns over cyber-harassment, and first

amendment issues. Articles about scandal involved “fall-from-grace” stories in which publicly respectable citizens, such as politicians or clergy members, were found using Craigslist for illicit purposes. Online dating culture stories focused on Craigslist’s contribution to internet-mediated hookups, casual sex, and online dating-mediated relationships. Less common story topics in the newspaper sample included business and economy (3.2%), public health (2.9%), and media related to Craigslist (1.4%). Business and economy stories covered Craigslist’s performance in the online sex trade. Public health stories discussed online interventions within Craigslist forums and research about sexually transmitted infections on Craigslist. And media stories include those about arts related to Craigslist sex forums (this will be explained in more detail later).

**Sex crimes and sex work.** Sex crimes and sex work comprised the largest proportion of topical coverage in newspaper stories about Craigslist sex forums. Exactly 50% of the stories in this sample were coded for this topic (see Table 4). Sex crimes were represented by stories about sex workers that involved the police as well as articles about murders, homicides, and assaults targeting primarily young women victims. Sex crimes coverage most substantially reported on Craigslist-mediated police stings that netted prostitutes conducting their business online. Sometimes sex sting coverage featured pimps or traffickers who were at the root of sex crimes being committed, but most often stories reported on prostitution arrests with little sympathy for the economic or social conditions that may lead a woman to engage in sex work. Newspaper stories about sex crimes on Craigslist engaged in a discourse of misogyny and victim-blaming. However, stories about murders and homicides focused largely on male perpetrators — violent



criminals who preyed on females who are naïve or disenfranchised. This discourse contributed to a hegemonic system of male dominance and female oppression, largely secured by news stories that trivialized men's agency in oppressing women, and by men's physical control of female victims in explicit criminal cases. Little attention was given to sex workers as self-employed free agents.

***Sex work and the sex industry.*** Before delving into coverage of violent sex crimes, it is crucial to examine news coverage of the most-discussed community in Craigslist sex forum coverage: Sex workers. Referred to by newspaper reporters as “prostitutes,” sex workers have been the primary perpetrators of criminal investigations conducted by police via Craigslist. Coverage of the sex industry commenced almost as soon as Craigslist began being reported on by U.S. newspapers. As early as October 2004, Craigslist was being described as a dating forum in which “The sex is not always free” (“Craigslist makes A-list: Check it twice (or so),” Oct. 20, 2004, *USA Today*). Between 2004 and 2016, discourse about Craigslist-based prostitution ebbed and flowed, peaking alongside concerns about the legality of its sex forums in 2009. A 2006 story suggested that “prostitutes request donations in exchange for services” on Craigslist to appear legal, (“Internet takes prostitution to a new level,” Sept. 13, 2006, *Chicago Tribune*), and by 2007, “police (in New York) and across the country say Craigslist is by far the favorite” site on which prostitutes advertise (“As prostitutes turn to Craigslist, law enforcement takes notice,” Sept. 5, 2007, *New York Times*). In 2009, police and lawmakers put the pressure on Craigslist, suing the company to remove its Erotic Services ad category. Sheriff Tom Dart of Illinois, who oversaw the initial suit against

Craigslist, was quoted in *USA Today*, calling Craigslist's "erotic category the 'largest source of prostitution in America.'" ("Craigslist eliminating erotic ad category," May 14, 2009, *USA Today*). Craigslist closed the Erotic Services forums on September 8 of that year, but public reactions were mixed. While police and some anti-sex work activists called the shutdown a victory, others saw Craigslist as a scapegoat in the war against sex workers. Mused a writer for the *Los Angeles Times*:

"Worn down by pressure from state attorneys general and advocacy groups, Craigslist will no longer provide a venue for pimps and prostitutes to advertise through thinly veiled offers for 'out-calls' and 'in-calls.' That's a good thing for Craigslist's reputation, but it won't make much of a dent in the sex trade. ("A less-sexy Craigslist," Sept. 18, 2010, *Los Angeles Times*)

A *New York Times* writer built on this argument in 2013, mentioning a number of other sites that allowed sex workers to advertise services and meet clients. The writer reported that more women than ever were selling sex online, in part because the "great transforming feature of the Internet is its anonymity. We all have learned that a person can do practically anything online without even their closest loved ones knowing," ("The new prostitutes," June 30, 2013, *The New York Times*). While Craigslist's relationship with sex work is multifaceted, and coverage varied significantly throughout the years based on events such as lawsuits or high-profile crimes, one trend remained consistent: Discourse stably referred to sex workers as prostitutes throughout the sample. While the word "prostitute" was used 787 times, the term "sex worker" was used only 23 times, and

only after the year 2010. Table 5 demonstrates the relative frequency of both terms throughout the newspaper sample timeline.

***Prostitutes and sex workers.*** Prostitutes were described overwhelmingly as being female, though sporadic examples of male sex workers appeared in stories about sex workers. No articles mentioned transgender sex workers, despite recent research showing that roughly 10% of transgendered people have participated in the sex trade (Fitzgerald, Elspeth, Hickey, & Biko, 2015). In news coverage, sex workers were consistently objectified, demonized, and blamed for their own victimization. When sex workers were not to blame, it was because they were the young female victims of sex trafficking. A 2009 story in the *Chicago Tribune* summed up the newspapers' sentiments concisely: "(Craigslis) was the Internet's version of a seedy street corner, a largely unregulated hotbed of prostitution that allowed easy access to illegal sex, authorities say" ("Craigslis closes ad area allegedly tied to sex trade," May 11, 2009, *Chicago Tribune*). A *Los Angeles Times* piece written the same day, coinciding with the removal of Craigslis's Erotic Services section, quoted the Illinois Attorney General, saying that "'the erotic services section on Craigslis is nothing more than an Internet brothel,'" ("INTERNET; States want erotic ads off Craigslis; Attorneys general say the website hasn't done enough to stop the posting of ads for prostitution," 2009, *Los Angeles Times*). This damaging language was typical of lawmakers quoted in newspaper stories, and it is devoid of context for sex workers' decisions to use Craigslis. Scholars and sex workers' rights advocates pushed back, noting that:

“Even if Craigslist boosts the policing, few expect prostitution to decrease dramatically. ‘Craigslist is only one of many online venues where clients and prostitutes contact one another,’ said Devon Brewer, a sociology researcher at the University of Washington who has written frequently about prostitution. ‘In terms of both decreasing prostitution and the violence associated with it, I’m not sure that shutting down one particular venue is going to make much difference at all.’ (‘INTERNET; States want erotic ads off Craigslist; Attorneys general say the website hasn’t done enough to stop the posting of ads for prostitution,” 2009, *Los Angeles Times*).

Level-headed responses were sparse in Craigslist coverage. Far more frequent were the stories of police stings and undercover jobs, with police officers touting prostitutes’ arrests like trophies. Other reports included the brutal rape of prostitutes by single offenders only charged years after ongoing offenses, as in the case of a Chicago-area man who repeatedly assaulted sex workers in his basement “sex dungeon” (“Allegations of abuse span years,” June 20, 2013, *Chicago Tribune*)

As discourse about Craigslist and sex work proliferated after 2009, another disturbing narrative took hold: That Craigslist is a hub for sex trafficking, a criminal offense more exploitative in nature, involving the explicit enslavement of women and children for sex work. Although the topic had gravitas, the same flippant tone used in previous stories accompanied descriptions of trafficking cases. For instance, a 2010 story in *The New York Times* reported on groups that call Craigslist “the Wal-Mart of sex trafficking” (“With an assist from Craigslist, a sex worker plies his trade,” Aug. 6, 2010,

*The New York Times*). As the 2010s wore on, stories began to focus on schoolteachers who sold sex on Craigslist during economic hardship (“Teachers under a microscope,” April 2, 2012, *Los Angeles Times*) or rappers who found themselves caught up in the game (“Rapper convicted in Maryland prostitution ring,” May 10, 2013, *The Washington Post*). By 2014, sex crimes coverage focused on violent crimes against sex workers (“Statements allowed in Craigslist rape case,” Feb. 7, 2014, *Chicago Tribune*) and an abundance of continued police stings capturing both prostitutes and their johns.

*Subjectivity and objectification.* So what does this discourse about sex workers on Craigslist sound like? How have newspapers described those women and men exchanging sex for cash? Many stories read like scripts for the early-1990s television show *Cops*. A 2006 story from the *Chicago Tribune* reported on the scene directly after a Craigslist-mediated prostitution sting. The writer led the story with a description of the sex worker in question:

“Dressed in a revealing halter-top, the 28-year-old woman sits in handcuffs on a motel- room bed in Des Plaines. Nearby, undercover police officers examine her modern-day tool of the trade: an Apple iBook.

‘Show us your Web site,’ demands Cmdr. Matt Hicks. ‘We know you are on there.’ (“Prostitutes use Web as new ‘street corner’: More work in suburbs, with cheaper motels, thin police resources,” Sept. 13, 2006, *Chicago Tribune*).

While the woman’s outfit was not of immediate relevance to the story, it was deemed the most important by the reporter given its placement in the lede. Other stories suggested you might find on Craigslist “a ‘sexy kitty’ available for \$250,” or “a ‘busty brunette’ for

\$180 an hour” (“The reliable source,” March 12, 2008, *Washington Post*). Even stories about scientific studies on Craigslist were attentive to the aesthetics of the prostitutes using online advertising. Wrote a *New York Times* reporter, quoting a social scientist: “...the Web was drawing different sorts of people into prostitution — they were better educated and they were thinner” (“The new prostitutes,” June 30, 2013, *New York Times*).

The objectifying language was not limited to female sex workers, however. While most stories retained a cool distance from describing the prostitutes in question, one particularly colorful article highlighted a young man’s career as a sex worker in San Francisco. While this story was less judgmental in tone than most in the sample, and than any about female sex workers, it was equally descriptive of the sex worker’s aesthetics:

‘Tall, taut, with bleached blond hair, James, 25, asked to only be identified by his first name only for fear of legal reprisals, but spoke candidly about his life as a sex worker, offering a rare glimpse into a local subculture that has become the subject of much debate: sex workers, including James, who say they have freely chosen this vocation. James said he was self-employed — no one manages his affairs, hires him out or takes a cut of his earnings. “I run myself — that’s why I do what I do,” he said. For a \$100 fee, he provides “healing erotic touch.” He finds most customers on Craigslist, the online classified service. ‘It’s how I support myself,’ he said. (“With an assist from Craigslist, a sex worker plies his trade,” Aug. 6, 2010, *New York Times*)

Even teens who were trafficked into sex work were not immune from being objectified. In a *USA Today* story explicitly titled “That’s slavery,” a young woman described her experience being pimped out over the course of 24 months. While the article gave voice to a largely voiceless population — teen sex workers themselves — it challenged the teen’s moral character in the process. Wrote the reporter:

“‘You think what you're doing is right when you're in that lifestyle,’ Graves said.

‘You drink alcohol to ease the stress. Red Bulls kept you awake, and cigarettes kept you from being hungry.’ ... She recruited others.

‘We'd go to malls, schools, group homes, bus stations and look for girls who were by themselves or looked very vulnerable,’ she said. For some of the time, Graves herself remained in high school, attending classes sporadically in boy shorts, small tank tops and worn heels.” (‘That's slavery,’ Sept. 27, 2012, *USA Today*)

Although sometimes glamourizing the sex industry and other times eliciting pity, sex work discourse also centered on the heinous and the abhorrent. A number of stories highlighted the nefarious sides of Craigslist, tackling issues related to pimps and human traffickers. Stories about these characters were not forgiving, and were written with an objective tone common to other types of newspaper crime reporting. While some stories about prostitution read almost like feature or human interest reporting, sensationalizing escorts’ risky lifestyles, stories about pimps and sex traffickers framed the perpetrators as predators.

***Pimps and human traffickers.*** Newspaper narratives about pimps were contradictory, switching between an “Internet killed the street pimp” discourse and the

“Internet is the new pimp” discourse. More often than not, stories reported on stings in which pimps used Craigslist as a tool to liaise prostitutes with potential clients. The word “pimp” was not always used to describe who trade in human sexual services; sometimes an arrest was reported without using language to call out the crime committed. For instance, an October 2007 story in the *Chicago Tribune* reported that: “An Aurora man and woman were charged with running a brothel that they advertised on Craigslist, police announced Thursday” (“Police: Online ad led to prostitution charges,” Oct. 26, 2007, *Chicago Tribune*). While skirting the term “pimp” may reflect legalese and style requirements in the newsroom (e.g. that a perpetrator is innocent until proven guilty), its lack of use in news stories points to a system of irresponsibility — a reportorial inability to call a spade a spade. This was illustrated by longitudinal trends in sex work terminology used throughout the sample. While the term “prostitute” was used 787 times between 2003 and 2016, the term “pimp” was used only 109 times, and more so in recent years, perhaps demonstrating a trend toward sex workers’ rights and anti-victimization discourse. Table 6 shows this pattern.

Pimps were described in coverage as both male and female. A 2007 story reported that “two Chicago women were charged with prostitution-related crimes, accused of placing the girls —14, 15 and 16 years old—on the erotic services section of Craigslist,” (“Internet escort bust nets 3 girls; Cops cracking down on Web get surprise: Youngest suspect 14,” Jan. 12, 2007, *Chicago Tribune*). However, stories about pimps more often reported on men being arrested. Pimp discourse appeared less concerned with the pimps’ aesthetics or social positioning than did stories about prostitutes, focusing rather on



whether the Internet had aided pimps in exploiting women, or whether the Internet had prevented street pimps from plying their trade. A central question was raised: Do sex workers have more autonomy in an online-mediated sex industry, or has Craigslist created a lucrative space for promoting the abuse and enslavement of women and children? In 2007, *The New York Times* reported that “The Craigslist modus operandi provides mobility, helping prostitutes to stay a few steps ahead of the law” (“As Prostitutes Turn to Craigslist, Law Enforcement Takes Notice,” Sept. 5, 2007, *New York Times*). The story continued, describing the processes that pimps and prostitutes have used to harness the power of Craigslist:

“Pimps have also adapted to the computer age, the police say. Among those arrested here in August, on charges of promoting prostitution, was Victor Teixeira, 31, of Mineola. ‘He was managing the technology of it,’ said Assistant Chief McGuire. ‘He recruited the women on the Internet. He put different ads up sometimes three times day. He would screen the calls and make the appointments.’”

Stories through 2016 continued to comment on the utility of Craigslist for mediating the relationship between pimps and prostitutes. A 2008 *Los Angeles Times* article reported that “the bulk of the sex industry is now conducted on the Internet”; a cop, Captain Jody Wakefield, said “I kind of think of Craigslist as the pimp” (“STEVE LOPEZ / POINTS WEST; Today's red-light district is online,” March 16, 2008, *Los Angeles Times*). That is, prostitutes are able to locate clients themselves rather than relying on pimps. *The Washington Post* supported this thesis two year later, shortly after

the removal of Craigslist's Adult Services forum (which replaced the Erotic Services site in 2009): "Even the most down-and-out sex worker now advertises on Craigslist (or did until recently), as well as on dating sites and in online chat forums. As a result, pimps' role in the sex economy has been diminished." ("5 myths about selling sex," Sept. 12, 2010, *The Washington Post*). And a 2013 article published in *The New York Times* further explicated Craigslist's utility for sex workers' emancipation from abusive pimps. In a review about a book describing prostitutes' murders, a writer expounded that:

"All women now need to set themselves up is a laptop. Men order them as if from room service. 'Craigslist had done more to delegitimize the age-old system of pimps and escorts than a platoon of police officers could,' Mr. Kolker writes.

'Why sign on with a pimp when it was so easy to take a picture and let a guy call you — way easier than walking the streets and looking for a guy and then trying to convince him and then waiting forever at the A.T.M. while he tried to sober up enough to remember his PIN?'" ("A ghost story that lacks an ending," July 17, 2013, *The New York Times*)

Although many stories reported on the pedestrian qualities of any police blotter story — who was arrested for pimping whom and where — the more substantial features reported on concerns related to Internet-mediated communication. A *New York Times* article from 2010 reported that advocacy groups were publicly calling Craig Newmark, Craigslist's founder, "Craig NewPimp" ("With an assist from Craigslist, a sex worker plies his trade," Aug. 6, 2010, *The New York Times*). By blaming Craigslist and sex

workers for fanning the sex trade rather than blaming johns for creating a demand, newspapers diminished the very real coercive relationships involved in selling sex online.

*Traffickers and trafficking victims.* Compared with pimps, sex traffickers received substantial coverage. While pimping was mentioned only 109 times, sex trafficking-related terms (“trafficking,” “sex trafficking,” “trafficked”) appeared 260 times within the sample. Sex trafficking is defined differently than prostitution under a pimp, in that it requires by law coercion or force, or in the case of child sex trafficking, the introduction of a minor by a pimp into the commercial sex trade (Polaris, 2017). It is unclear whether newspapers reported on pimping and trafficking as determined by court definitions, or if newspapers referred to each phenomenon colloquially based on their news judgment. Use of sex trafficking terminology peaked in the newspaper sample during 2010-2011, before which few stories about trafficking on Craigslist were published. The uptick in coverage appears to be a response to law enforcement pressure in 2010 for Craigslist to remove its Adult Services forum (after it replaced Erotic Services in 2009). Activists and advocates argued that the Adult Services forum provided an outlet for sex traffickers to exploit women and minors. The frequency of trafficking-related terms by year is provided in Table 7.

The first story about sex trafficking was published in 2008 in a traditional crime report about a police sting. Chicago police were on top of prostitution, pimping, and trafficking on Craigslist from early on in the coverage timeframe. A reporter for the *Chicago Tribune* wrote that area police made 149 arrests related to prostitution, pimping, and trafficking between January 2007 and June 2008. The *Tribune* also reported that, in

the previous week, Craigslist buckled under pressure from lawmakers, posting “a disclaimer stating that human trafficking and child exploitation would be reported to police.” (76 arrested in Craigslist sting project,” June 16, 2008, *Chicago Tribune*).

Another 2008 story harkened back to discourses about Craigslist’s responsibility for online pimping, and about the role of Craigslist in mediating child sex work online. This story identified teenagers as particularly easy victims. Wrote a reporter for *The Washington Post* in a story about sex trafficking prevention in D.C. schools:

“Teens involved in commercial sex are easily manipulated, said Michelle Zamarin, an assistant U.S. attorney who heads the D.C. Human Trafficking Task Force.

‘They look like adults,’ but they think like children, Zamarin said. ‘When you talk to these children and listen to their logic, you realize the maturity at 15 is still a child. They believe this person loves them.’” (“Anti-prostitution initiative taken to D.C. schools,” Nov. 24, 2008, *The Washington Post*).

Trafficking stories also flipped the discourse of blame present in many articles about prostitutes and police stings. Stories were more attentive to the manipulation and coercion involved in sex work — an important distinction given that prostitution stories typically vilified the sex workers in question. Another article in *The Washington Post* reported on a girl who was trafficked online. However the minor’s judgment and agency were both called into question:

“At 14, she said, she started using drugs and skipping school. She soon met an older man.

‘He gave me money, drugs, clothes,’ she recalled. ‘I was having fun. Then he started hitting me.’

The boyfriend took her to Arizona, made her pose for photos in lingerie and have sex with men who responded to Craigslist ads.

‘I complained a lot so he gave me drugs,’ she said.” (“Young prostitutes are offered rescue instead of arrest; new program targets underlying issues,” May 24, 2009, *The Washington Post*).

By 2010, headlines responded directly to trafficking concerns and personal ad forums. Stories with titles such as “Sex-trafficking opponents fight Craigslist’s ‘adult services’ ads” (Aug. 7, 2010, *The Washington Post*) and “Raised voices over sex ads; Some fear they may facilitate child sex trafficking. *Village Voice* articles say the anxiety is overstated” (Nov. 29, 2011, *Los Angeles Times*) ran alongside pleas for Craigslist to acknowledge teens trafficked through the site. There were first-person appeals by trafficking victims, including one published in an Aug. 7, 2010 *Washington Post* story. A 17-year-old former child sex worker (referred to by the pseudonym of MC) became famous for writing a series of letters to Craigslist’s founder, Craig Newmark, asking him to shut down the Adult Services section. “I was first forced into prostitution when I was 11 years old by a 28-year-old man,” she wrote. “I am not an exception.” According to *The Washington Post*, Newmark did not respond.

In 2013, horror stories about child sex trafficking gave way to social analyses. Another discourse shift occurred. A *New York Times* article did not defend the trafficking market on Craigslist, nor did it argue that it doesn’t exist, but it explained to readers that

the Internet wasn't necessarily to blame. Wrote *The Times* reporter: "Of course, if capitalism teaches us anything, it's that a demand-heavy market will find a way to thrive no matter what the obstacles." The story went on:

"The market doesn't care if prostitution is right or wrong, empowering or exploitative. The demand sustains human trafficking and under-age escorts engaging in survival sex. Just last month, the social-service organization Covenant House in Midtown Manhattan released the findings of a survey it conducted with Fordham University, which found that nearly half of the under-age prostitutes seeking help said they did it because they did not have a place to live" ("The new prostitutes," June 30, 2013, *The New York Times*).

Although coverage continued to include crime reports of traffickers and exploited women and teens, more recent coverage invalidated concerns about trafficking on Craigslist altogether. Finally, media were aware of their own shortcomings in reporting about Craigslist-related sex crimes. A *Washington Post* story titled "Lies, damned lies and sex work statistics" ran on March 28, illuminating the sensationalism surrounding sex trafficking on Craigslist:

"One of the more comical incidents occurred in 2011, when an activist group called the Women's Funding Network put out a study alleging that ads for underage sex trafficking on websites like Craigslist and Backpage.com had 'risen exponentially in three diverse states.' The claim was picked up by media outlets across the country, including *USA Today*, the *Houston Chronicle*, the *Miami Herald*, the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, and the *Detroit Free Press*. *The Village*

*Voice*, which owns Backpage.com, took a look at the methodology, a term that flatters what the study's authors actually did. They merely asked a small sample group of people to guess the age of women pictured in ads for escort and erotic massage services. They then just assumed that the guesses were correct, and extrapolated the percentage of 'underage' women in their sample set of photos were indicative of online sex ads in general.

Not surprisingly, none authors of the 'study' were credentialed academics. Still, it inspired not only a wave of media coverage, but outrage from state attorneys general and members of Congress, and promises for new laws. The activists knew exactly what they were doing. As the director of the group that conducted the study told the *Voice*, 'We pitch (a study) the way we think you're going to read it and pick up on it. If we give it to you with all the words and the stuff that is actually accurate — I mean, I've tried to do that with our PR firm, and they say, 'They won't read that much.''" ("Lies, damned lies and sex work statistics," March 28, 2014, *Washington Post*)

Only four years earlier, the *Washington Post* had also fanned the panic about child sex work and the online marketplace. Quoting Ernie Allen, president of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, one article reported that "Internet services have made it possible to pimp these kids, offering them to prospective customers with little or no risk" ("Adult ads permanently off U.S. sites, Craigslist says," Sept. 16, 2010, *The Washington Post*). It turned out that the news may always be news, but that the facts reported may not have be facts at all — at least in the context of Craigslist sex forums.

**Other sex workers.** While most of the Sex Crime and Sex Work discourse in the newspaper sample focused on prostitution, pimps, and human traffickers, a minority of stories discussed other sex workers, including exotic dancers and strip club owners who had turned to Craigslist to organize private parties (“From peep shows to the look of luxury; ten years after crackdown, skin business has new image,” Jan. 7, 2005, *Washington Post*). Coverage also included people engaged in survival sex, a form of sex work in which non-professionals exchange physical intimacy for room and board (“ROOMS FOR SEX; Posts on Craigslist offer housing in exchange for everything but money,” April 5, 2006, *Chicago Tribune*; “The new prostitutes,” June 30, 2013, *New York Times*; “Evanston man charged with sex abuse of boy,” Jan. 27, 2014, *Chicago Tribune*). Some stories focused on race, with rapper pimps running prostitution rings (“Rapper convicted in Maryland prostitution ring,” May 10, 2013, *Washington Post*) or gang members in white Cadillacs peddling teenagers outside of D.C. (“5 Va. men charged in teen sex ring,” March 30, 2012, *Washington Post*). Others still focused on New York City’s massage parlor businesses, which “advertises on Craigslist, highlighting ‘Absolutely Pretty Russian & Asian’ and a ‘qualified massage therapist,’” (“In Brooklyn neighborhood, multiplying massage parlors cause residents to fret,” June 26, 2013, *The New York Times*). Equally troubling as the (sometimes misreported) narratives surrounding sex work on Craigslist were the sensationalized stories about violent crime mediated through the website.

**Murders, manslaughter, and homicides.** Adding to the already-substantial fears over sex work and Craigslist sex forums were a handful of stories about the brutal



murders of women who had advertised on the site — whether explicitly for sex work, or not. The first prominent story appeared in June 2007, when the *Los Angeles Times* reported that a female San Diego State University co-ed went missing after she had met a man for a date through Craigslist. To be clear, the co-ed was not a professional sex worker. Reported the *Times*:

“Jou was last seen June 23, when she went to a party with Burgess after the two apparently met on Craigslist.com, authorities said. Jou is a student at San Diego State University and lives with her mother in Rancho Santa Margarita. Her mother received a text message the next day from Jou's phone, saying that her cellphone battery was dying but that she would be home soon. Authorities suspect the message wasn't sent by Jou.” (“Suspect arrested in missing student case; John Burgess, sought in the disappearance of an O.C. woman, has been detained in Florida,” June 27, 2007, *Los Angeles Times*)

Throughout the next two years, police tracked down the primary suspect in Jou’s disappearance — a registered sex offender by the name of John Burgess. Burgess evaded prosecution due to lack of evidence, but was picked up on an unrelated drug crime in Florida in 2009. That same year, Burgess confessed to disposing of Jou’s body in the Pacific Ocean after a night of hard partying, during which Jou apparently overdosed. He was charged with involuntary manslaughter and sentenced to five years in prison.

Reported the *Los Angeles Times*:

“After the sentencing, Jou's parents called on Craigslist to bar sex offenders from placing ads on the site or to require them to disclose their convictions in their

ads.” (“Man gets five years in student’s death; John Burgess pleaded guilty in Donna Jou’s 2007 disappearance,” May 19, 2009, *Los Angeles Times*).

Despite pressure arising from Burgess case for Craigslist to increase ad monitoring, more high-profile murders and violent crimes entered news discourse in the following years. News stories about Craigslist-related deaths peaked in 2009 and 2010 alongside stories of lawsuits against Craigslist, then trailed off into the present era. The most memorable and oft-covered perpetrators were men seeking female victims, as in the notorious Craigslist Killer cases. There were numerous stories in which the newspapers referred to violent criminals as “Craigslist Killers.” The first was about a Minnesota man who killed a woman who responded to his ad for a babysitter. But more coverage was devoted to a second case in which an attractive Boston University School of Medicine student named Phillip Markoff was linked with attacks against three masseuses he met through personal ad forums in spring 2009 (“Links seen among attacks on three women in hotels,” April 18, 2009, *New York Times*; “Craigslist eliminating erotic ad category,” May 14, 2009, *USA Today*). Markoff was indicted that June but hung himself in jail awaiting trial the following summer (“Craigslist stops offering adult ads,” Sept. 5, 2010, *Washington Post*). Other cases involved teenagers who killed adults after the teens were solicited through Craigslist for underage sex (“16-Year-Old Is Arrested In Killing in Brooklyn,” March 26, 2009, *New York Times*; “Teen says she killed dozens,” Feb. 17, 2014, *USA Today*). One story even involved a consensual threesome gone wrong. After arranging an “erotic game” with a man and woman he met on Craigslist, one Texas man killed the other, claiming self-defense. According to the *Washington Post*, “before any

sex acts occurred, she passed out in the hot tub... Hicks then threatened to kill Donaldson, which is when Donaldson got his gun and shot Hicks, according to defense filings,” (“Guilty plea, no jail time in Erotic Services killing,” July 16, 2009, *Washington Post*). Additional stories about Craigslist-mediated killings ranged from concerns about a Long Island serial killer who preyed on escorts who advertised on Craigslist (“Discovery of 4 bodies raises suspicion of a serial killer,” Dec. 15, 2010, *New York Times*) to a young woman who killed a prominent D.C. lawyer during a botched robbery after arranging to meet the lawyer for sex (“Woman in Craigslist killing to be sentenced Friday,” Aug. 19, 2015, *Washington Post*). Although these brutal attacks were as diverse as Craigslist’s clientele, the news stories contained a common theme: That Craigslist-mediated killings were anomalies, but that they could happen to anyone — lawyers, masseuses, babysitters, or even you.

**Law and regulation.** Sex crimes and sex work comprised half of newspaper coverage about Craigslist sex forums. These stories about prostitutes and pimps, human traffickers and violent sexual criminals highlighted the news industry’s interest in Craigslist’s status as “the Internet’s version of a seedy street corner” (“Craigslist closes ad area allegedly tied to sex trade,” May 11, 2009, *Chicago Tribune*). News about the illicit sex trade and sex crimes also drove legislation — and subsequent news coverage of regulatory efforts — aimed at diminishing such activity on Craigslist’s sex forums. This coverage peaked between 2008 and 2011 alongside concerns about Craigslist’s Erotic Services and Adult Services forums (see Table 8).

Starting in 2007, lawmakers took aim at Craigslist's sex forums, beginning in the spring of that year, when Chicago's Cook County sheriff Thomas Dart began running sting operations using Craigslist's Erotic Services. After three stings that netted child prostitutes as well as adults running brothels, Dart went to the press. According to the *Chicago Tribune*, "On Friday, he expressed anger at the company, saying his office has encouraged Craigslist to remove its 'erotic services' section, but the ads continue to run" ("10 charged in Internet prostitution," Dec. 22, 2007, *Chicago Tribune*). This was the statement that launched a thousand stories, so to speak. Throughout the next three years, Sheriff Dart became the country's most vocal opponent of Craigslist's sex forums, leading a crusade against the company in order to reduce prostitution and child sex trafficking across the country.

Driving a substantial increase in reporting in 2009 and 2010 were Sheriff Dart's allegations against Craigslist. Stories in the *Chicago Tribune* suggested that Dart's requests for Craigslist to monitor sex work advertising on its site were well-founded based on "hundreds of prostitution arrests, many of them based on ads found on Craigslist" ("Craigslist sued for prostitution ads," March 6, 2009, *Chicago Tribune*). According to the same *Tribune* story, Dart's allegations evolved into "a nationwide lawsuit by the top state prosecutors from Illinois and 39 other states," which pressured Craigslist to monitor adult advertisements on the site. The *Los Angeles Times* reported in early May 2009 that Craigslist made a deal with Dart and his supporting team of attorneys general in November 2008, which forced the site to implement "a telephone and credit card verification system to keep track of sexual service ads and implemented a

flagging system through which users can alert the site to objectionable listings;” Craigslist used this flagging system to defend itself against civil suits filed by Dart in March 2009 (“INTERNET; States want erotic ads off Craigslist; Attorneys general say the website hasn't done enough to stop the posting of ads for prostitution,” May 11, 2009, *Los Angeles Times*). Two days later, on May 13, 2009, Craigslist bowed to national legislative pressure and agreed to remove its Erotic Services forum, replacing it with the highly-monitored Adult Services ad forum. The *Chicago Tribune* quoted Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan as saying: “I think this is a fundamental change, a recognition by Craigslist that the erotic services section truly had become an Internet brothel, truly had become an illegal and dangerous place” (Craigslist closes ad area allegedly tied to sex trade,” May 14, 2009, *Chicago Tribune*).

However, politicians’ praise for Craigslist’s revised forums was short-lived. Later that summer, Dart filed another lawsuit against Craigslist, “saying a change in the category name from ‘Erotic Services’ to ‘Adult Services’ had failed to deter prostitutes from using the site” (“Craigslist Prostitution Lawsuit Tossed,” Oct. 23, 2009, *Chicago Tribune*). That lawsuit was thrown out by a federal judge in late October 2009. The judge determined that erotic services such as exotic dancing were protected on personal ad forums, and thereby not considered illegal prostitution. According to the same *Tribune* story, U.S. District Court Judge John Grady determined that “Sheriff Dart may continue to use Craigslist's Web site to identify and pursue individuals who post allegedly unlawful content. But he cannot sue Craigslist for their conduct.”

Grady's decision did not placate external criticism against Craigslist. *The Washington Post* reported in August 2010 about a teenager who was trafficked using Craigslist. The teen known as MC, who was described in earlier pages, wrote letters to Craigslist's founder Craig Newmark, urging him to remove the Adult Services forums. "I was first forced into prostitution when I was 11 years old by a 28-year-old man," she wrote. "I am not an exception." ("Sex-trafficking opponents fight Craigslist's 'adult services' ads," Aug. 7, 2010, *The Washington Post*) Pleas from MC were bolstered by Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan and attorneys general from 16 other states, despite the 2009 ruling in favor of the Adult Services forum. Rather than crumble under pressure from legal agencies, Craigslist took policing of Adult Services into its own hands. In September 2010, "the San Francisco-based classifieds site placed a black 'censored' label on its home page over the category that some law-enforcement and other critics said was becoming a virtual red-light district" ("Craigslist step won't end fight," Sept. 7, 2010, *Wall Street Journal*). Later that month, spokespeople for Craigslist went on the record, saying that they had permanently disabled the Adult Services section, although it was not clear whether the forums had been closed due to pressure from legal teams and activists, or whether Craigslist intended to make itself an example of impositions against free speech by political interest groups.

Regardless of what caused Craigslist to post its black "censored" box, it launched an ongoing debate about the First Amendment and the Internet, one of the most heated controversies covered in this sample of news articles. *The Washington Post* articulated the debate in simple terms:

“The long-running battle over Craigslist's ‘adult’ or ‘erotic’ ads - which can be thinly veiled as advertisements for a massage or can contain explicit photos and text - illustrates the complexity of policing the Internet. On one side is an iconoclastic company defending what it sees as a major virtue of the Web: the ability to create a self-regulating virtual commons. On the other are prosecutors and anti-prostitution activists who say that the anonymity of the online world can be a great vice making it easier for people to exploit women and children in the real world” (“Craigslist stops offering adult ads,” Sept. 5, 2010, *The Washington Post*).

Although Craigslist removed its Adult Services forum voluntarily, a formal lawsuit would have created unwelcome precedents for the Communications Decency Act, which at the time prevented (and still prevents) websites from liability for what their users post online. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that another Adult Services court case would “stifle not just Craigslist but also EBay, Google, Yahoo and much of the rest of the online world” (“A less-sexy Craigslist,” Sept. 18, 2010, *Los Angeles Times*). Discourse about speech implications surrounding the Adult Services censor continued well into the end of 2010, and bubbled up again as new court cases challenged the role of website operators in surveilling violent and hateful speech online. A 2012 California court hearing delivered a ruling that Match.com and related sites must match users’ dating profiles with sex offender registries, for instance. This decision raised Internet regulation concerns across the country, with one writer opining that “running a website doesn't entitle you to be an absentee landlord” (“Dating sites finally meet responsibility,” March

23, 2012, *Los Angeles Times*). But the case made no impact on national decisions regarding the Communications Decency Act, or Craigslist's liability for personal ad content. As lawsuits against Craigslist faded into history, so did discourse surrounding First Amendment concerns, with related discussions falling off after 2012.

**Scandals.** One area of newspaper discourse that also addressed surveillance of online ad forums, but that relieved sex workers of some blame, was discussion of online sex scandals. The heat mostly centered on political figures who turned to Craigslist to orchestrate affairs outside of their marital commitments. But a handful of stories also focused on those “good citizens” who should avoid Craigslist due to their social positioning: clergy members, military men, and schoolteachers, for instance. Scandal coverage was most prominent in 2010-2011, when a bevy of politicians was put under the national microscope (see Table 9).

**Political scandals.** Newspapers began picking up political scandal stories in 2007, when then-Idaho Republican senator Larry Craig was arrested in a Craigslist sting at the Minneapolis-St. Paul international airport. Police saw a Craigslist ad for someone requesting “no-strings fun while I’m waiting at the airport” and subsequently arrested Senator Craig when he revealed his genitals to a plainclothes officer working undercover (“Sting charges against senator harsher than some,” Sept. 6, 2007, *New York Times*). In 2008, New York governor Eliot Spitzer made headlines with a prostitution scandal involving a high-end escort service in New York City. Although technically Spitzer’s transgressions were unrelated to Craigslist, newspapers were quick to link him with the personal ad site. “Aren't there cheaper hooker hook-ups on Craigslist? It makes you



wonder how sharp Eliot Spitzer's pencil was on the state's fiscal discipline,” quipped a writer from *The New York Times* (“Ways of the wayward,” March 12, 2008, *New York Times*). And out west in Los Angeles, a reporter surveilled Craigslist with a team of police officers, citing Spitzer’s scandal as his catalyst:

“Midafternoon on a workday, and what am I doing? Surfing the Internet for hookers. But it's not what it sounds like, I swear. The Eliot Spitzer scandal back East made me wonder how a lonely politician might get into trouble here in the land of milk and honey. So I'm with the vice squad at a downtown Los Angeles police station, tracking suspicious ads on Craigslist and other websites. Yes, Craigslist, which offers much more these days than used sofas and 1997 Subarus.” (“Today's red-light district is online,” March 16, 2008, *Los Angeles Times*)

Discourse about politicians on Craigslist trailed off between 2008 and 2011, at which point a New York state congressman was caught in the Craigslist crossfire. On Feb. 10, 2011, Gawker reported that Congressman Chris Lee met a woman via the site’s sex forums. Reported the *Washington Post*, “the Web site Gawker posted an alleged e-mail exchange between a man who used Lee's name — but identified himself as a divorced lobbyist — and an unidentified woman. Gawker reported that the two had met through the personals section of Craigslist” (“Congressman resigns after report of online flirting,” Feb. 10, 2011, *The Washington Post*). In light of the Gawker news, just hours later Lee resigned from his congressional post. According to the *Washington Post* article, Gawker reported the woman “said she was looking for ‘financially & emotionally secure’

men who don't 'look like toads.'" However, it did not report that the woman was a Black woman — something the LGBTQ and feminist press highlighted in their stories. Newspaper coverage did include that Lee sent the woman a shirtless photo. Twitter exploded after his resignation was announced.

Which brings the news narrative to another political controversy: The Anthony Weiner Twitter scandal. Weiner was a New York state Democratic congressman, exactly like Chris Lee, and it didn't take long for reporters to make that connection. In June of 2011, Weiner tweeted lewd photos of himself to his public Twitter account. Right off the bat, Weiner was mentioned in the context of other political figures who had taken falls online. Reported *The Washington Post*:

"Foley (R-Fla.) resigned rather than face an ethics committee investigation. More recently, Rep. Chris Lee resigned after sending shirtless photos of himself to a woman he had met on Craigslist. Weiner on Monday said he had no reason to believe that any of the women he communicated with were underage but allowed that he had only their social media profiles to go on. Ethics lawyer Stanley Brand said there are no clear-cut congressional rules on how members should behave on the Internet. 'We're in the Twitter era,' he said." ("Weiner admits to Tweeting lewd photo of himself," June 7, 2011, *The Washington Post*)

By then politicians' social media SNAFUs were becoming part of regular news coverage. Articles began to take on a tired tone. The *Los Angeles Times* noted that "It was not immediately clear whether congressional Democrats would react as harshly as Republicans did in February when faced with a similar scandal," and they would not

predict whether Weiner would resign (“Weiner admits Tweeting lewd photos,” June 7, 2011, *Los Angeles Times*). Just ten days later, after Weiner’s resignation, *The Washington Post* ran an editorial with a retrospective counter-argument to the *Times*:

“It’s pointless to critique Weiner’s handling, or mishandling, of the scandal. The outcome was clear from the beginning, and the only question was whether Weiner would resign immediately - as did former representative Chris Lee, when Web sites published a shirtless photo he sent to a woman he met on Craigslist - or spend a week or two in denial” (“Why Weiner had to go,” June 17, 2011, *The Washington Post*).

Newspapers continued covering other politicians-gone-wild throughout the Weiner scandal, with Eliot Spitzer even hosting a CNN roundtable with magazine reporters who asked him to respond to allegations that “sex scandals have been multiplying like rabbits” (“A reckless body,” June 8, 2011, *Washington Post*). Not even two months later, another scandal — this time involving David Wu, a Democrat and congressman from Oregon — preoccupied news headlines. While referencing Chris Lee and Anthony Weiner, the *Chicago Tribune* detailed allegations that Wu made “unwanted sexual advances” toward his colleague’s teenage daughter and sent his aides “photos of himself in a tiger costume that have since become public” (“Ore. lawmaker to quit over accusation,” July 27, 2011, *Chicago Tribune*). Like the other lawmakers caught up in online sex scandals, Wu stepped down from his political post, and newspapers reported on the bizarre online-mediated events that led up to his resignation. And then coverage of political scandals slowed, only once and again returning to reference the hot-blooded male leaders who let

careless Internet use lead to their professional demise. Although not all stories were directly associated with Craigslist, reporters were quick to cover each scandal by relating it back to Chris Lee.

***Society scandals.*** Politicians were featured more prominently in newspaper scandal coverage than other members of society, and were reported in the context of Craigslist even when they had no established links to the site. But that is not to say that politicians were the only public figures featured in fall-from-grace stories. Newspapers also reported on Craigslist sex scandals involving people who society thinks should “know better.” Very early in the timeline of Craigslist sex forum coverage, a well-known magazine reporter was caught in an FBI child sex work sting, for instance (“Metro briefing New York: Manhattan: Gossip writer arrested on sex charge,” Sept. 16, 2015, *The New York Times*). Two years later, the *Washington Post* reported on a Catholic priest who transmitted HIV to a U.S. military member he met on a men-seeking-men sex forum (“Navy chaplain pleads guilty; HIV-positive priest is sentenced in sex case,” Dec. 7, 2004, the *Washington Post*). A 2008 *Chicago Tribune* article reported on another clergy member who was arrested — this time a reverend who was netted during a police sting in which a female officer posed as a sex worker on Craigslist (“Arrest of pastor saddens church,” May 12, 2008, the *Chicago Tribune*). By 2010, a New York City teacher “was yanked from the classroom and accused of conduct ‘unbecoming of a teacher’ after she wrote a column criticizing a new rule blocking the use of Craigslist to solicit sexual encounters” before she became a school employee. She was thus dubbed the “Hooker Teacher” despite having ample classroom experience and advanced degrees (“A less sexy

Craigslist,” Sept. 18, 2010, *Los Angeles Times*). And as recently as February 2016, police in Washington, D.C. netted a high-profile sports player during a sting. The *Washington Post* repeated a narrative already familiar to readers:

“What surprises people is that despite the publicity and the occasional high-profile arrest of a public figure - such as former NBA player turned CBS sports commentator Greg Anthony - there seems to be no let-up. ‘The oldest profession in the world keeps on coming back,’ said John Fanning, chairman of the Advisory Neighborhood Commission for Thomas Circle, where he has lived for the past 25 years. ‘You think people who would see that the police are on it, that there’s a sting on, and yet they still come.’” (“Prostitution still a problem along 14th Street corridor,” Feb 16, 2016, *Washington Post*)

**Online dating culture.** A number of articles also discussed online dating culture without the added dramatic context of sex crimes, sex work, legislation and regulation, or sex scandals. Although online dating stories only comprised 11% of story topics in the newspaper sample, they helped illuminate ideological concerns associated with Craigslist sex forum coverage. Online dating stories were more frequent early on in Craigslist coverage. They trailed off after 2009 (see Table 10).

Online Dating Culture stories included those about the Casual Encounters Craigslist forum, which — unlike Adult Services or Erotic Services — has historically catered to individuals looking for no-strings-attached hookups with consenting adults who are not sex workers. The very first story in the sample, published on Dec. 14, 2003, reported that Casual Encounters is “sexually explicit (and transactional in tone)” (“Find a

date online,” Dec. 14, 2003, *The Washington Post*), while the second story in the sample quickly linked Casual Encounters with closeted gay and bisexual men who are cheating on their wives (“Married men with another life to live,” Aug. 14, 2004, *The Washington Post*). Additional stories, like those about closeted men who have sex with men, tended to hint at Craigslist users’ sexual orientations, adulterous natures, or social classes. One story discussed a woman who caught her husband cheating on Craigslist (“In the click of a mouse, a betrayal,” Nov. 6, 2011, *The New York Times*), while a number addressed people seeking or selling drugs on Casual Encounters forums (e.g. “INTERNET drug hookups; Cocaine plagues New York, heroin plagues Chicago — and users seem all too willing to spread the disease,” June 28, 2007, *The New York Times*; “Sentencing in pills-for-sex case,” Aug. 6, 2014, *Chicago Tribune*). Many stories discussed the utility of the site for gay men seeking casual hookups (e.g. “How many American men are gay?,” Dec. 8, 2013, *The New York Times*; “Online dating precautions: Meet two police officers who followed them,” April 19, 2015, *The Washington Post*).

Other stories about Online Dating Culture included those about dangers and safety concerns, people you might meet online (such as LGBTQ people or criminals), or online sexual exploration (such as having threesomes or finding others with sexual kinks). Others still focused on the types of linguistic summer-saults Craigslist posters use in order to evade police or other authority figures. For instance, a 2005 story about HIV/AIDS trends reported that “In the shorthand of the sexually explicit personals, ‘POZ UB2’ indicates a man who is H.I.V positive seeking the same,” (“A good report on AIDS, and some credit to the Web,” Aug. 18, 2005, *The New York Times*). By the winter

of 2010, a review of a book about Craigslist culture reported on “a few common themes” observed between Craigslist ads:

“One is epic self-regard — the typical personals column promises the beautiful, sensitive, brilliant, soulful and their synonyms. Another common theme is a thicket of initials (SWM for single white male, WLTM for would like to meet, etc.) meant to conserve classified-ad expenses but also lending a sense of grim efficiency to the project — not so much affairs of the heart as affairs of 75- characters- or-less shorthand. And then there is that hallmark of the personal-ad columns: utter humorlessness, notwithstanding all the SWF protestations about looking for someone ‘who makes me laugh.’” (“Lonely hearts, of like minds,” Jan. 25, 2010, *The Wall Street Journal*).

Alongside the “utter humorlessness” observed by writers were a handful of articles that also reported on online anonymity and its impact on ad content. “In this age of cyberselves, with hookups just a Craigslist ad away, the game has evolved to the point of no rules,” opined a writer for *The Times*’s popular Modern Love column (“Let’s not get to know each other better,” June 8, 2008, *The New York Times*). “We all have learned that a person can do practically anything online without even their closest loved ones knowing,” reported another writer for *The Times*, this time describing sex workers abandoning the streets for online forums (“The new prostitutes,” June 30, 2013, *The New York Times*). Articles described stalkers who used Craigslist to commit crimes “they would never do offline,” (“Stalkers wield new tool against victims: Online ads,” July 15, 2013, *The Washington Post*), while others tried to explain away the creepy anonymity

factor after murders had been orchestrated through Craigslist. One such story announced that meeting in public could help assuage concerns about online dating safety, but it went on to quote the founder of the Manhunt.com, a gay dating site, who said: “all online dating sites — gay and straight, dating-focused or sex-focused — have deceptive users looking to commit crimes. ‘It’s the dark side of the business, but it’s the truth,’” (“How to avoid tragedy in online dating: Think like a cop,” April 20, 2015, *The Washington Post*). The truth about Craigslist — at least as determined by high-circulation newspaper journalists — seemed to be this: No matter what you do online, you are never truly safe, because the next murderer, rapist, or pimp waits patiently on a sex forum nearby.

**Stories about public health, business, and related media.** Fewer than one of every ten stories (7.5%) reported on a primary topic not covered earlier in this chapter. Those articles described one of three areas: the state of Craigslist’s business model or its market performance ( $N=9$ ), public health research and interventions orchestrated through Craigslist ( $N=8$ ), or fine arts reflecting on Craigslist’s sex forum content ( $N=4$ ). Business stories followed booms and busts among Craigslist’s portfolio, reporting most prominently on money made from the Adult Services and Erotic Services forums, which eventually required fees for ad postings. Other business stories reported that the economic recession forced some women into the sex trade, or they commented that Craigslist was recession-proof because the sex trade is always booming. Not surprisingly, public health stories tended to focus on HIV/AIDS and other STIs transmitted among gay men who planned Internet-mediated hookups. And finally, related media coverage



touched on unrelated personal ads websites and dating apps, or on arts and cultural events that treated Craigslist as a sort of muse.

## **Conclusions**

If one fact is true about the way Craigslist was described in mainstream U.S. newspapers between 2003 and 2016, it is what two researchers wrote in an academic article about the rise of HIV through online forums: ““The entry of Craigslist produces a transformative shift in casual sex-seeking behavior,”” they wrote (“What’s the big idea,” April 15, 2012, *The Washington Post*). High-circulation newspaper stories covered Craigslist primarily in terms of its utility for the sex trade. Prostitutes were framed as Craigslist’s primary users, with human traffickers and pimps playing second fiddle. Sex work was portrayed as something that required police intervention, as it compromised the moral fiber of news readers’ communities and threatened the safety of people seeking sex on the site. Sex workers were demonized for using Craigslist, and Craigslist was villainized for allowing sex workers a comparably safe space to ply their trade. Craigslist was also criticized for its lack of interest in surveillance culture, which newspapers suggested allowed murderers, rapists, and other violent criminals to rampantly attack women on the site. Arguments ensued over Internet hosts’ legal obligation to monitor sexual content posted by public citizens. When questions of First Amendment rights seemed to finally play out, news of political scandals and high-society sex stings dominated coverage. Even less controversial stories, such as those covering everyday online dating issues, framed Craigslist as an unreliable, dangerous forum through which to orchestrate casual sex. Gay men were blamed for transmitting HIV and STIs on the

site, and arts and culture stories pinned Craigslist as hosting gritty clientele. At best, newspapers reported on Craigslist's positive financial performance while calling into question the ethics of its business model.

Newspaper reportage of Craigslist's sex forums reflected dominant ideology at large. It diminished the value of marginalized populations, including sex workers and gay men. Caught in the "news net" (Tuchman, 1978a) were stories of deviant populations who use online sex forums and in turn threaten societal welfare. Not mentioned are the stories of everyday folks using Craigslist to expand their sexual horizons — not to exploit the naivety of others or to hire sex workers, but to meet other curious people interested in low-stakes trysts, or even romances. Newspapers from 2003 through 2016 covered Craigslist's sex forums as a place to wager high-stakes bets against physical safety, sexual health, and the sanctity of heterosexual monogamous relationships. To use Craigslist for sex was to label oneself a sort of pariah. At worst, if you frequented Craigslist, you might wind up dead.

Newspapers at times may have pushed back against their own narratives, calling on activists and advocates who valued anonymous Internet-mediated spaces as bastions for free speech and sex workers' rights. But such counter-narratives were always lost among fear-mongering and a vicious type of voyeurism fed by stories of social Others. As this project moves into an analysis of LGBTQ and feminist online magazine coverage of Craigslist sex forums during the same time period, it will become clear that stigmatizing narratives were not limited to elitist mainstream media, but that they

preoccupied discourse about Craigslist across a spectrum of ideological models of news production.

## CHAPTER 4

### **LGBTQ and Feminist News Coverage of Craigslist Sex Forums, 2005 - 2016**

Online LGBTQ and feminist magazines in the sample began covering Craigslist sex forums more than a year after national newspapers, beginning in winter 2005.

Although the mainstream press beat alternative outlets to the earliest stories, LGBTQ and feminist media quickly established a familiarity with Craigslist and developed a tone of authority by reporting on stories not found in newspaper content. While newspaper reporters wrote about Craigslist using a removed voice and skepticism about Craigslist's dangerous, criminal clientele, LGBTQ and feminist media reported on Craigslist from a first-person perspective. Sex workers and online daters shared their experiences on the sex forums. Audiences were assumed to be familiar with online personal ads.

However, that is not to say LGBTQ and feminist media wrote favorably about the website. Like mainstream U.S. newspapers, LGBTQ and feminist online magazines framed Craigslist as a harbor for the Internet's seedy characters: prostitutes and pimps, violent criminals, scandalous politicians, and promiscuous queer people interested in casual hookups. Like mainstream U.S. newspapers, LGBTQ and feminist online magazines suggested that Craigslist was a gathering place for sexual Others. This chapter describes trends in alternative media content about Craigslist sex forums. It identifies tensions in alternative media ideology when describing online dating cultures. Crucially, this chapter identifies normalizing judgment about sexual deviance present in "resistant" narratives about Craigslist sex forums. Like Chapter 3, Chapter 4 traces discourse about

Craigslist through the archives, digging back into Craigslist coverage since 2005, when Craigslist stories started appearing in the LGBTQ and feminist press, and following it into the present.

To accomplish these goals, I follow the same structure and methodology as described in Chapter 3. I begin by outlining how LGBTQ and feminist online magazines articulated Craigslist's reputation for their readers, focusing on descriptions of the sex forums specifically. The chapter continues by describing six primary themes in content that emerged during pattern coding of the LGBTQ and feminist media sample: Online Dating Culture, Sex Crimes and Sex Work, Law and Regulation, Related Media, Scandal, and Public Health. These primary themes were surfaced by linking themes that emerged in LGBTQ and feminist online magazine content back to ideological concerns and linguistic patterns related to normalizing judgment. News sources and sexual subjects related to each topic of coverage are also described within each section of the findings. News sources included, for instance, sex workers, LGBTQ community members, feminists, and media critics. Sexual subjects included sex workers, politicians and other high-profile public figures, various criminals, social outsiders and marginalized communities, and risk groups for STIs and HIV, such as gay men. This chapter describes how Craigslist sex forums have been spoken about in LGBTQ and feminist online magazines, with attention given to whether those media have truly crafted alternative, oppositional discourses about Craigslist sex forums.

Throughout this chapter, I provide evidence for news topics, news sources, and news subjects by quoting language from articles published in the LGBTQ and feminist

online magazine sample, which included the outlets *The Advocate*, *Bitch*, *Feministing*, *Ms. Magazine*, *Out.com*, and *Pride.com*. I first outline Craigslist's reputation as reported by these alternative media, explaining discourse development in chronological order. The section about Craigslist's reputation in the news is especially concerned with establishing normalizing judgment in discourses that would often be understood as "resistant." I then describe story topics by their prominence during the sampled years. The date of publication, story title, and news source are provided alongside each quotation, as is any contextual information necessary for understanding the meaning of the quoted content. Although the goal of this chapter is to illustrate longitudinal trends in discourse using qualitative methodologies, quantitative findings are interspersed in the text when they help to illustrate trends in content.

In total, I coded and analyzed themes in 130 LGBTQ and feminist online magazine articles published about Craigslist sex forums between 2005 and 2016. The articles were sampled from six of the most prominent online alternative news sources targeted to LGBTQ people and feminist readers (see Table 11). Stories were coded in clusters by year of appearance based on turns in discourse that occurred during the sampled timeframe (see Table 12). Coding was conducted in NVivo. I used the first- and second-cycle coding procedure outlined in Chapter 2 and applied in Chapter 3.

## **Reputation**

**2005 - 2007.** Unlike stories about Craigslist sex forums in national newspapers, which initially described Craigslist as an online dating site, LGBTQ and feminist online magazines began reporting on Craigslist as a Web forum on which sex workers could

recruit johns. The first story in the sample came from *Feministing*, an online community and blog that promises to offer “sharp, uncompromising feminist analysis of everything from pop culture to politics,” and which aims to inspire “young people to make real-world feminist change, online and off” (*Feministing* Staff, 2016). In that first story published in 2005, *Feministing* reported on young women coming out as sex workers on social and traditional media. The story roundup first featured a young woman blogger named Jane Vincent whose work had originally appeared in the *Village Voice* under the title “Whore Pride.” *Feministing* reported that Vincent was a “self-proclaimed slut and whore.” Reflecting on her essay in the *Village Voice*, *Feministing* reported that: “She gets her clients from Craigslist.org, and although she does a lot of random freaky-deaky shit, never has intercourse with them” (“Out and proud: Coming out as a sex worker,” Jan. 20, 2005, *Feministing*). While this story emphasized Craigslist’s role in supporting the sex industry right off the bat, it was ultimately supportive of sex workers, reclaiming violent language used to marginalize women in mainstream discourse. Unlike most of the mainstream news stories, the *Feministing* story gave a voice to a sex worker herself. But this story also begged the question: Does reclaiming language truly diminish oppressive forces present in word choices? Words like “whore” and “slut” are not inherently harmful, but their use was often pejorative to the people alternative media claim to represent and advocate for. This is a subject I will return to many times throughout this chapter in discussions of alternative media ideology.

In practically no time at all, Craigslist became simultaneously passé and titillating in the eyes of LGBTQ and feminist online magazines. The gay pride website Out.com

published an article one week after the *Feministing* story, describing Craigslist's Casual Encounters forum as an online destination for gay men who might be bored with their sex lives ("8 signs you're bored with your sex life," Jan. 27, 2005, Out.com). Later that spring, Out.com published another story that mentioned gay culture on Craigslist sex forums. The story insinuated that cruising Craigslist could help gay men observe potential partners of diverse social statuses, including straight and bi-curious men with certain sized genitals ("Is small beautiful," April 17, 2005, Out.com). While the point of the "Is small beautiful?" article was to question cultural expectations about masculinity, the subtext suggested that Craigslist was a place where sexual Others hang out — such as "straight" men who want to have sex with men. This is a prominent demographic on Craigslist sex forums (described in Chapter 5), but one that was largely ignored in mainstream news narratives.

In 2006 and 2007, stories about Craigslist continued to link its sex forums with abnormal behavior and events, such as sex work and gay cruising. (UrbanDictionary.com defines "Cruising" as a verb: "Trying to pick up someone for anonymous gay male sex," ex.: "Larry Craig was arrested for cruising for sex in an airport bathroom"). In the eyes of many media, Craigslist was a candy store for the depraved. For instance, when *The Advocate* reported on a new book about sex addiction among gay men, the author, a famous psychotherapist, was quoted: "We're seeing people who become sex addicts and don't have a long history with the problem prior to going online. The Internet is the crack cocaine of sex addiction," he said. ("Carnal knowledge," Jan. 26, 2007, *The Advocate*). By equating the Internet and online sexuality with illicit drug use, writers and scholars



marginalized the very audiences they hoped to appeal to: gay men using the forums to arrange casual sex. Statistics of the era confirmed that LGBTQ people used Craigslist more often than straight people (“More than a third of LGBT Web users visit blogs every day,” Jan. 04, 2007, *The Advocate*), and yet stories focused on illegal immigrants using Craigslist to find sugar daddies (“Rags to riches via the Web,” Jan. 29, 2007, *The Advocate*), creepy landlords (“The case of the Cobra Killer,” Feb. 26, 2007, Out.com), and misogyny on the forums (“Brace yourself,” Oct. 30, 2007, *Feministing*).

**2008 - 2009.** Toward the end of the 2000s, writers began highlighting concerns over online safety for women and people in queer communities. An article in *Bitch* reported that the hacker group Anonymous had posted fake BDSM ads in Craigslist Casual Encounters, outing and publicly shaming every man that responded to the ads (“Wack attack,” March 3, 2008, *Bitch*). Out.com reported that Craigslist ads posted by transgender men were being flagged for removal (“The trans fags,” March 16, 2008, Out.com). The feminist press continued to report on misogyny in Craigslist forums (“Need a woman’s point of view,” Oct. 13, 2008, *Feministing*), and LGBTQ advocacy publications continued to frame the Internet as a place for dangerous encounters to be arranged. The manager of a West Coast sex club was quoted as saying “The Internet... is dangerous,” illustrating the perceived safety of online communities among LGBTQ folks compared with older brick-and-mortar sex establishments (“And they’re always glad you came,” April 30, 2009, *The Advocate*). Then came the stories about brutal rapes orchestrated on Craigslist (“Weekly feminist reader,” June 6, 2009, *Feministing*). Despite catering to audiences with different demographics and psychographics than national

newspapers, LGBTQ and feminist online magazines repeated a narrative common to mainstream news reportage of Craigslist: that the forums are seedy at best and dangerous at worst.

**2010 - 2011.** Like the mainstream press, LGBTQ and feminist online magazines turned their attention to Craigslist-based prostitution in the early 2010s, and stories about Craigslist appeared with much more frequency than in years prior. This is reflective of Craigslist-related lawsuits and legislative actions taking place during the time period, as well as concerns over murders orchestrated through the site. While a summer 2010 story about online dating published on Pride.com teased that “One of the weirdest things about online ads is that because people can put up anything they want, the standards are often rather low,” (“Loose ‘rules’ for finding a date online,” Aug. 6, 2010, Pride.com), more attention was given to stories that marginalized the very populations they attempted to serve, such as gay men and feminists who use Craigslist to seek casual sex. Sex workers took the brunt of the criticism. For instance, *The Advocate* reported on the Adult Services forum closure in September 2010, saying that Craigslist was a place to find “a by-the-hour date” (“Craigslist axes ‘Adult Services’ in U.S.,” Sept. 16, 2010, The Advocate), and *Ms. Magazine* wrote that Craigslist made sex work too easy. “In the world of escorting, essentially straight-up prostitution, Craigslist was the Walmart. Everybody said that,” the writer pointed out (“Pole-dancing dolls, sex work during Ramadan and gay Catholic mass: Editors’ picks 9/5-911,” Sept. 11, 2010, *Ms. Magazine*). Stories in the LGBTQ and feminist press were sometimes resistant to mainstream messages that sex forum shutdowns would combat prostitution. They often tried to defend sex workers’

rights. An essay in *Feministing* reported on a story that danah boyd, a feminist media scholar, wrote for the *Huffington Post*. The *Feministing* author reported that boyd:

“... makes a compelling case for the idea that Craigslist, rather than a modern-day ‘digital pimp,’ actually serves (errr, served) as a kind of ‘public perch from which law enforcement can [could] watch without being seen’” (“5 things you need to know about the Craigslist Adult Services censor,” Sept. 8, 2010, *Feministing*).

But was surveillance of Craigslist forums by police actually beneficial for sex workers, or were sex workers the ones being prosecuted for prostitution-related crimes? This was a critique *Feministing* neglected to consider.

Other stories in 2010 and 2011 turned their attention to the amusing and the bizarre. *Feministing* wrote about finding threesomes through online dating apps (“Ask Professor Foxy: How do we have a threesome?” Sept 12, 2010, *Feministing*), while *The Advocate* reported on botched adult circumcisions reputedly arranged through Craigslist (“Man arrested for performing circumcisions at home,” March 4, 2010, *The Advocate*). In winter of 2011 came the many stories about Chris Lee, a congressman who send his topless photo to a woman he found through Craigslist. Chris Lee was reported on extensively in national U.S. newspapers and LGBTQ and feminist online magazines. Later that year were other stories familiar to readers of the mainstream news: Tales of hooker teachers (even a blog published by the “hooker teacher” herself!), murdered prostitutes, and public health interventions for HIV/AIDS.

**2012 - 2013.** In 2012, Craigslist discourse trailed off compared to the deluge of stories in 2010 and 2011. Coverage continued to focus on social anomalies, but it also

took a sometimes more lighthearted tone than the legal stories and political scandals that dominated mainstream and alternative media in years prior. It appeared that Craigslist had become engrained in the social milieu, seeming more commonplace to LGBTQ and feminist readers than in years past. For instance, there was a story about a sci-fi film about lesbian aliens from Planet Zots. “On Zots, much like Craigslist, romance is extremely undesirable,” the writer quipped, alluding to Craigslist’s reputation for casual debauchery (“They came from planet Lesbos,” Jan. 6, 2012, Out.com). Other stories also emphasized Craigslist’s lesbian connection, as in a Valentine’s feature about where lesbian couples met their partners (“Real life lesbian love stories for Valentine’s Day,” Pride.com, Feb. 14, 2012). There was also a story about a lawsuit between the state of Kansas and a lesbian couple and the sperm donor they met online (“Watch: Kansas sues sperm donor for child support,” Jan. 4, 2013, *The Advocate*).

However, the strange and sordid still dominated the mix. Reportage about Craigslist helped the site maintain its status as a place for politicians to arrange affairs with underaged partners (“Minnesota Dems turn against lawmaker who hooked up with 17-year-old,” Aug. 20, 2012, *The Advocate*), a place to organize threesomes (“Girls, Girls, Girls: The Bad Friend episode recap,” Jan. 28, 2013, Bitch), and a place to be recruited for porn films (“Why are so many adult film actors dying,” May 9, 2013, Out.com). There was even a story about the military using Craigslist to surveil gay military officers stationed in Afghanistan (“Gay soldier in Afghanistan? Watch out for Craigslist,” July 31, 2013, Out.com). Discourse about Craigslist was firmly embedded in

the public sphere, and it seems that social Others continued to be reputed as the website's primary users, both in the mainstream and the LGBTQ and feminist presses.

**2014 - 2016.** As reportage slowed to a trickle in recent years, stories about Craigslist in LGBTQ and feminist media had developed their own trends, which differed substantially from stories in the mainstream press. Although reportage continued to focus on Craigslist's utility for sexual Others, there was a playful tone emblematic of LGBTQ and feminist online magazines, with writers joking that "Yes, there was a pre-Internet version of Craigslist available, but deciphering enigmatic messages scratched into truck stop walls just wasn't my thing," ("Op-ed: Meeting guys in the Stone Age wasn't easy," May 20, 2015, *The Advocate*). Recent coverage included more stories about sperm donors and nontraditional families starting on Craigslist ("An open letter to Perez Hilton from a real gay dad of New York," Feb. 18, 2014, Out.com), artists exploring the intersections of the internet, art, and identity ("The Bay Area body," June 6, 2014, *The Advocate*), "straight guys" seeking other men for sex ("The queer acronym alphabet: Limiting in its inclusiveness," July 6, 2014, Pride.com) and those lonely souls who, to quote the pop star Rihanna, "fell in love in a hopeless place" ("A letter to my partners: How I found the truth in the cliché 'you can't help who you fall in love with,'" March 10, 2014, *The Advocate*).

And yet those hopefully optimistic pieces were offset by the typical panic, including young gay men's reflections on "every horror story of Craigslist violence and hookup gone awry," ("Op-ed: Helping gays find love isn't easy, especially in the south," May 1, 2015, *The Advocate*), or murderers using Craigslist to find housing while on the

run (“Ex-boyfriend sought in Minn. bar owner’s murder,” Aug. 26, 2014, *The Advocate*). A few stories went out of their way to criticize normative discourse about Craigslist sex forums, challenging stereotypes about the site’s clientele and users. In an interview about the porn industry documentary “Hot Girls Wanted,” one University of Nevada - Las Vegas professor was quoted: “Adopting a faux-menacing tone, she adds: ‘Pop culture is influencing your daughter, Craigslist is recruiting and luring her in ... this could potentially be the path that your daughter could find herself walking’” (“Adult industry professionals weigh in on ‘Hot Girls Wanted,’” June 29, 2015, *Bitch*). In some stories, sensationalized Craigslist reportage had become the butt of its own joke.

### **Story Topics**

Stories in the LGBTQ and feminist online magazine sample fit into six categories — the same categories as the mainstream newspaper sample, minus Business & Economy stories. The topics included: Online Dating Culture, Sex Crimes & Sex Work, Law & Regulation, Media, Scandal, and Public Health. These topics were determined through holistic coding, which describes a unit of discourse as a whole rather than at the sentence or word level (Saldaña, 2015, p. 80). Themes (or holistic codes) represent the topical coverage of each entire news story in the sample. Critics of compartmentalized coding processes such as holistic coding may argue that news topics are not mutually exclusive, and that a story about law and regulation, for instance, may also be about sex crimes. In order to avoid reductionism, I followed a specific protocol for establishing holistic codes: When there was ambiguity about the topic of news coverage, I returned to story’s title and lede. That is, I determined story topics based on journalistic framing of

the news story. Story topic frequencies are detailed in Table 13.

Table 13 clearly demonstrates that Online Dating Culture stories made up the majority of Craigslist sex forum coverage (32.3%), followed closely by stories about Sex Crimes & Sex Work (26.9%). Online dating culture stories focus on Craigslist's contribution to internet-mediated hookups, casual sex, and online dating-mediated relationships. Sex crime and sex work stories included articles about prostitution and pimping, rape and sexual assault, police stings against sex workers, sex trafficking, and the like. Three topical areas were essentially tied for third-most-covered: Law & Regulation (13.8%), Related Media (13.1%), and Scandal (12.3%). Law and regulation articles described legal concerns about online sex forums, formal legislative actions against Craigslist, regulation and surveillance of Craigslist's sex forums, concerns over cyber-harassment, and first amendment issues. Related Media stories centered on arts and culture related to Craigslist sex forums. Articles about scandal involved "fall-from-grace" stories in which publicly respectable citizens, such as politicians or clergy members, were found using Craigslist for illicit purposes. Public Health was the topical focus of only two stories in the sample (1.5%), despite being mentioned in passing in numerous other stories.

**Online dating culture.** Online dating culture comprised the the largest proportion of topical coverage in the alternative news sample, and coverage was distributed broadly across the time periods sampled (see Table 14). Nearly one-third (32.3%) of the stories in the sample were coded for this topic. Stories about online dating culture primarily focused on how LGBTQ people and feminists use Craigslist to find romantic and sexual

partners. Some articles discussed lesser-known LGBTQ minorities that frequently use Craigslist, such as “straight” and “str8” men — guys who identify as heterosexual but seek casual sex with other male-bodied people. Online dating stories often took on a lighthearted tone, sometimes making fun of the ways LGBTQ people and feminists use online dating sites. However, many stories also referenced misogyny and homophobia in Craigslist forums, or they discussed cyberbullying and cyber-harassment in online communities. Some writers even editorialized by using language that shamed members of LGBTQ and feminist communities who use Craigslist forums, repeating descriptors such as “whore” and “hooker.”

***LGBTQ culture.*** LGBTQ communities are of course the target market for *The Advocate*, Pride.com, and Out.com, and discourse about online dating culture often catered specifically to that audience. Early stories joked that being obsessed with Craigslist was an indicator that gay men were bored with their sex lives. Signs of relationship boredom included that: “Youve fallen asleep during penetration. You insist that the television be on while engaging in oral. Youve become a Craigslist casual encounters junky,” (“8 signs youre bored with your sex life,” Jan. 27, 2005, Out.com, typos original to article). Other stories between 2005 and 2007 reported that less-visible LGBTQ people could be found by browsing Craigslist, such as “straight or bi-curious men asking to be with a man with a small penis,” (“Is small beautiful?,” April 17, 2005, Out.com), or trans people who used the forums frequently, but who sometimes threatened more established online sex subcultures such as gay men (“The trans fags,” March 16, 2008, Out.com). Statistics of the time demonstrated that LGBTQ people were more



visible on Craigslist than were straight folks, but stories often focused only on gay men. According to *The Advocate*, “20% (of LGBTQ people) were likely to visit Craigslist.org, compared with 13% of heterosexuals. A national survey of 2,451 adults over 18 in the United States conducted November 13–20 showed that gays spend more overall time online than straight people.” (“More than a third of LGBT Web users visit blogs every day,” Jan. 4, 2007, *The Advocate*). Stories about queer sexual subcultures continued into 2013, with coverage including critiques of “straight-acting” gay men using Craigslist to seek partners (“Op-ed: What ‘straight-acting’ really means,” Jan. 4, 2013, *The Advocate*).

As Craigslist played a more and more prominent role in the LGBTQ community and its reach became more well-known, articles began reporting on ways that Craigslist had begun taking the place of traditional gay establishments, such as sex clubs. There was concern among business proprietors in the queer community that Craigslist was a less reputable, and more dangerous, space to orchestrate hookups than the bathhouses and underground establishments that provided a haven for the community in the ’80s and ’90s. Reported *The Advocate* in 2009:

“As one might expect, the advent of Internet cruising has negatively affected revenues at encounter establishments over the past 15 years. In Southern California, Internet cruising for sex began with DELOS, a BBS (bulletin board system), and progressed to AOL chat rooms and now hookup sites. So why pay a \$15 or \$20 entry fee when you can get it for free on Craigslist?

‘The Internet,’ Glen says ominously, ‘is dangerous. We give condoms and lube. We promote safe sex. We have on-site HIV testing. Online you could meet an ax

murderer. We get people out of the parks, out of the alleys, and out of the restrooms. We give them a safe place to come.” (“And they’re always glad you came,” April 30, 2009, *The Advocate*)

By 2011 there were additional stories about the ways that Craigslist had augmented traditional gay dating culture. One story lamented that “No Cruising” signs, meant to discourage gay men from having casual sex outdoors in the Silver Lake neighborhood of Los Angeles, were taken down as a result of Craigslist making history of the outdoor hookup. “The signs have been up since 1997, but residents of the gentrifying neighborhood have pushed to take the signs down as fewer incidents of public sex are being reported (possibly because websites like Craigslist and iPhone apps like Grindr have created more options for anonymous encounters)” (“Cruising ok now in L.A. neighborhood?” Sept. 9, 2011, *The Advocate*). Other stories reflected on the good old days — and sometimes on the not-so-good old days — of gay hookup culture. A reporter for *The Advocate* reminisced about the difficulties of meeting like-minded men in rural spaces in the 1980s. While earlier stories lamented the loss of physical queer meeting spaces, this article focused on positive changes brought on by technology. Wrote the 50-something author:

“You had to meet the right guy at the right time, at the right place, under the right circumstances, and drop the right hints. (Yes, there was a pre-Internet version of Craigslist available, but deciphering enigmatic messages scratched into truck stop walls just wasn't my thing)” (“Op-ed: Meeting guys in the stone age wasn’t easy,” May 20, 2015, *The Advocate*).

Although equating Craigslist sex forums to truck stop walls is indicative of classism common to the LGBTQ and feminist online magazine sample, the writer's dismissal of antiquated forms of dating is a step forward from earlier discourses, which suggested Craigslist contributed to the decline of gay culture, not its development. A story in 2014 used a similarly positive tone. The writer described a casual encounter he orchestrated through Craigslist, and a subsequent polyamorous relationship that also evolved from online dating. Wrote the young man in a love note for his partners:

"I didn't think anyone would really affect me in any meaningful way—or that I had it in me to give anything back. And yet, a Craigslist meeting morphed into something extraordinary. I knew I had to reconsider some self-imposed obstacles the first night I walked into your apartment and saw the books and things you'd collected in your travels through Africa, listened to you animatedly tell stories I wanted to know more about, saw your brilliant smile, and especially when you leaned in to kiss me. Five years later, Sam, you walked into our house one evening (bless the Internet!) and I knew I was potentially in trouble again—good trouble" ("A letter to my partners," March 10, 2014, *The Advocate*).

The discourse about online dating culture — especially in LGBTQ online magazines — wavered between resentment and acceptance. Alternative media continued to associate Craigslist with hookup culture and non-monogamy, Othering its clientele. The more recent articles finally seemed to accept Craigslist for its matchmaking potentials, but Internet love stories were tempered with cautionary tales about using Craigslist as an LGBTQ person or feminist.

*Online dating threats and risks.* LGBTQ and feminist online magazines identified homophobia and misogyny as the two primary threats to online dating culture. However, the same publications also contributed to homophobia and misogyny in their own reportage. This created a complicated tension that made me wonder whether alternative media were part of the problem or part of the solution, as was the case in many areas of Craigslist reportage in the alternative news sample.

*Homophobia and trans-misogyny.* Given the ample coverage of the gay lifestyle in Craigslist reportage, it is no surprise that stories about homophobia would make it into the editorial mix. However, the types of homophobia described in Craigslist sex forum discourse was not necessarily expected. The earliest coverage of anti-LGBTQ sentiments on Craigslist sex forums was an article about trans-misogyny, in which gay men on Craigslist sex forums were not amenable to dating transmen, or people labeled female at birth. More so than other LGBTQ groups, it seems that transmen were marginalized in Craigslist communities. In 2008, a long essay in Out.com mused about one transman's experience in online dating:

“Despite handling the often rugged and unforgiving testing ground of a gritty downtown gay bar with aplomb, Hunter — like the rest of the men you see on these pages — is the kind of guy some online gay hookup sites don't want you to meet. ... They were born female, yes, but they now live their lives as men. FTMs (female-to-male transsexuals). Tranny boys. Trans men. But also gay men, just like any gay men — yet with one small difference (no, not that difference — I'm referring to their second X chromosome in place of the Y that determines an

infant's sex at birth to be male). Which is what provokes dating websites like Adam4Adam — and even people on Craigslist — to delete or flag these guys' profiles, insisting that their sites provide a service 'for men only'" ("The trans fags," March 16, 2008, Out.com).

The following years were relatively quiet in terms of homophobia coverage. But that discourse re-emerged in 2013, when another story reported that masculine gay men were not just misogynistic toward transmen, but also toward feminine-presenting gay men. One op-ed described a gay man's experiences on Craigslist's sex forums, where long before the age of Grindr, expressions of gay masculinity were revered. The article challenged the hetero-masculine language used by "straight-acting" gay men on Craigslist. The author wrote:

"Now, when I see gay men state that they are 'straight-acting' on places like the 'men seeking men' (m4m) posts on Craigslist, or on ManHunt, I sometimes write them and ask: 'If you were "straight-acting" wouldn't you be posting in the "men seeking woman" (m4w) section or on WomanHunt?"' ("Op-ed: What 'straight-acting' really means," Jan. 4, 2013, *The Advocate*).

While this article raised interesting questions about the role of masculinity in gay hookup culture, it also suggested that masculine gay and bi men must actually be straight — in its own right a type of homophobia. Like other articles in the sample, the 2013 op-ed simultaneously liberated and stigmatized people with marginalized sexualities. A story in 2014 also tried to defend feminine expressions of gay masculinity, noting that "despite the public manifestation of bottom-shaming there is an underground community of butch

tops anonymously seeking fem bottoms. Craigslist, Grindr, Scruff, Adam4Adam, whichever site or app you use, is full of ‘masc seeking fem,’” (“Op-ed: It’s time to stop bottom-shaming,” Oct. 31., 2014, *The Advocate*). While femme-shaming and bottom-shaming were explained as outcomes of HIV panics (because “bottoms” are more likely to contract HIV than “tops”), there was a lack of in-depth analysis that linked transphobia and femme-phobia to larger trends of misogyny and heteropatriarchy in culture. Although stories reported on “tranny boys” and “straight-acting” Craigslist users, they did not attempt to analyze or dismantle these concepts for readers, thus failing in their activist agenda.

There were, however, more straightforward instances of homophobia reported on and criticized by the LGBTQ press. An Out.com story covered state-sanctioned homophobia by reporting that “the Naval Criminal Investigative Service in Afghanistan are ‘tracking’ combat soldiers who use Craigslist to hook up with other men” (“Gay soldier in Afghanistan? Watch out for Craigslist,” July 31, 2013, Out.com). Another story described the trouble gay men have dating in the deep south. The article focused on matchmaking services for gay men, because “For gay and bisexual men whose families and careers do not allow them to be open about their sexuality, the usual networking mediums for the gay community can be difficult to use. For many of the men we meet, location-based smartphone apps, online dating sites, and bars aren’t worth the risk of being outed,” (“Op-ed: Helping gays find love isn’t easy, especially in the South,” May 1, 2015, *The Advocate*). Even in a progressive era of instant gratification and online-mediated encounters, homophobia is a real concern for gay men in certain geographical

regions. Paradoxically, lesbians and bisexual women were never mentioned in the context of homophobia, and discussions of lesbian relationships were largely relegated to Craigslist coverage in the feminist press. The term “gay” was used 341 times in the alternative news sample, compared with “lesbian,” which was used 58 times, and “bisexual,” which was used only 27 times. See Table 15 to see a breakdown of orientation-based terms in the sample.

*Misogyny.* Alongside tales of homophobia and trans-misogyny were stories about people on Craigslist who violated women’s rights or who described women as the second sex. These pieces were primarily published in the feminist online magazines and included links to offensive Craigslist ads. For instance, there was a story in *Feministing* in 2007 that linked to a misogynistic Craigslist rant about women being attracted only to money and status, not to men’s physical appearances or personalities (“Brace yourself,” Oct. 30, 2007, *Feministing*). A similar story appeared in 2008, when *Feministing* linked to another Craigslist ad in which a man described his wife like a beat-up car: “Wife, slightly used, 1964 Model Needs muffler, as it is currently VERY LOUD” (“Nothing like some Craigslist misogyny,” April 25, 2008, *Feministing*). Other articles reported on feminists’ Craigslist dating experiences. One writer searched for a feminist man to date on Craigslist, only to receive anti-woman responses in return. She described the responses she received as such:

“Out of 68 replies, only four were spam, two included pictures of penises, and two or three were anti-feminist: ‘Real men do no like left wing feminists. Just saying.’

‘Feminists killed Marriage and Trust between men and women. That’s why there’s so many divorces and single parents in the western world.’ I hope this one was a joke: ‘I hope you wrote that ad from the kitchen, where you belong.’

(“Feminist Craigslist dating experience: The trolls,” May 3, 2010, *Ms. Magazine*).

And while a majority of these stories reported on men’s behavior on Craigslist forums, women writers themselves also contributed to misogynistic discourse in alternative media. An example of women-shaming-women was especially pronounced in this story from Pride.com, published in 2009:

“Back on the topic of craigslist, what happened to all the nice lesbians who used to post there? How come women-seeking-women ads now are only for skanky women posing for camera phone self-portraits in thongs in front of smudged mirrors, unmade beds and electrical cords? Gross,” (“Femmblog: Lesbian bitch,” Sept. 23, 2009, Pride.com).

The use of words like “skanky” partnered with references to “unmade beds and electrical cords” points to problematic discourse and classist undertones used throughout the LGBTQ and feminist media sample. While colloquial language may come off as playful to some readers, in this case it also reads as explicitly derogatory. While some stories in the sample attempted to normalize Craigslist use among feminist and queer communities, writers often seemed to judge those who sought sex through internet forums.

***Craigslist speak.*** One of the least controversial areas of Craigslist coverage, both in the mainstream newspaper sample and in the LGBTQ and feminist media sample, was reporting about Craigslist’s unique vernacular. A 2007 story about sugar daddies reported



about Craigslist solicitations for a “generous\$ benefactor” (“Rags to riches via the Web,” Jan. 29, 2007, *The Advocate*), while other stories focused on HIV-centric language or markers of sexual orientation. In one story about HIV terminology on Craigslist, a reader asked in a Q&A:

“I have to say, this Craiglist ad really makes me angry: ‘I’m HIV-negative, clean, disease- and drug-free. Looking for the same.’ Do you think ads like this are discriminatory against poz guys or just ill-advised? (In case you’re wondering, I am HIV-positive.)”

The columnist responded that, despite the Internet’s utility for selecting partners with certain HIV serostatuses, “language matters.” He continued:

“What you say about HIV and other STDs (and how you say it) takes this question squarely into the sex etiquette court. In search of better language, I looked around on Craigslist myself and saw some ads that I think will do the trick (so to speak), without any of the nastiness or judgment that often marks these kinds of postings. Here are two samples: - ‘I prefer HIV-negative but I am poz-friendly — please know and disclose your status — I play SAFE only!’ - ‘HIV-neg (tested 9/8/11), drug/STD-free. I am uninterested in those who would like to have unprotected anal sex. Maintaining a negative HIV status is important to me.’” (“Advice: Is it wrong for HIV-negative guys to seek same?,” Oct. 24, 2011, *The Advocate*).

However, by 2012, it seems that the same columnist had substantially revised his response. In another Q&A, he responded to another reader question (perhaps scripted by

the editors): “Q: Is it wrong for HIV-negative guys ‘to seek same’?” The columnist responded:

“A: No, many guys – whether positive or negative – are into sero-sorting these days, that is hooking only with those of (presumably) their same HIV status. Note, I said presumably because being “disease-free” is meaningful only in the moment you’re being tested. Candid, up-front personals, such as those on Craigslist or various apps, can help smooth the way for more satisfying sexual (and emotional) relationships. But don’t fall prey to this phrase “u be clean and disease-free 2” — unless you’re really into good hygiene.” (“Advice: The etiquette questions you’ve always wanted to ask about STDs,” July 30, 2012, *The Advocate*).

Other articles about “Craigslist speak” commented on “str8” and “straight-acting” guys who sought trysts with other men. These terms, which are used liberally to identify “masculine” gay men and closeted bisexual or bi-curious guys, pepper many Craigslist sex forums. No stories focused on lesbian-specific or woman-centric terms used on Craigslist, which is perhaps not surprising giving the preponderance of gay-focused terminology described in Table 15.

**Sex crimes and sex work.** More than one-quarter (26.9%) of stories primarily covered sex crimes and sex work, making it the second-most common topic in the alternative media sample. Like mainstream newspaper stories, articles published about sex crimes and sex work in the LGBTQ and feminist online magazines discussed sex workers, pimps and human traffickers, violent crimes, and demographics of individuals that fit into each of those categories. Also mimicking newspaper discourse was the

LGBTQ and feminist online magazines' decision to refer to "prostitutes" more frequently than "sex workers," and to cover trafficking more often than pimping (see Tables 16 and 17). Although trends in discourse were relatively similar between the two genres of journalism, substantial differences arose in each genre's treatment of sex workers' rights, advocacy stories, and returning voices to marginalized populations.

***Prostitutes and sex workers.*** Sex work was a central topic in Craigslist coverage. Like newspapers, LGBTQ and feminist media quickly identified sex work as one of Craigslist's central services. Early stories marveled at Craigslist's ability to foster communities of sex workers, but they also covered Craigslist as a recruitment forum for the porn industry or as a place to meet one's untimely demise at the hands of an angry escort. While stories in the alternative news sample were more forgiving, and sometimes even celebratory, of sex work, they were smattered with cautionary language about sex workers and the sex industry. Further, prostitution-related terms were used more frequently than sex worker discourse (see Table 16), which could be interpreted as running counter to LGBTQ and feminist magazines' activist missions.

*Sex workers' rights.* I will begin this discussion with stories that take an activist stance: those about sex workers' rights. A number of stories featured sex workers' voices prominently, with columns and stories written by sex workers, or with sex workers featured as primary news sources. However, other articles — especially those about the Adult Services and Erotic Services forum shutdowns — expressed diverging positions on sex workers' rights, creating an ideological rift in discourse about the Craigslist censorship controversies.

The earliest story in the sample is also the earliest example of sex workers' rights coverage. It was discussed briefly in this chapter's introduction. The article, published on *Feministing*, was titled "Out and proud: Coming out as a sex worker." It describes a piece called "Whore Pride" published a week earlier in the *Village Voice*, as well as other sex worker-positive media, including blogs and a new magazine about sex work. The magazine's editor was quoted as saying:

"We want the general public to become aware of issues such as the physical working conditions of sex workers and their health care and housing needs, and to start considering sex workers as real people rather than mythical beasts who only come to life when someone drops a quarter into a slot."

*Feministing* was supportive of pro-sex work media, evidenced by the way the writer closed the article with: "Write on, ladies!" ("Out and proud: Coming out as a sex worker," Jan. 20, 2005, *Feministing*).

No further examples of sex work discourse arose until 2009, when *Feministing* published another story about sex workers in a guest blog post called "International Day To End Violence Against Sex Workers... My Thoughts." (Dec. 17, 2009, *Feministing.com*). The article repeated verbatim a speech given by sex workers' rights activist Audacia Ray, originally published to her own blog. The speech included bits that explained how sex workers looked after each other in the wake of media attention to the Boston Craigslist Killer, especially in the Boston area, where Audacia Ray lived. This was the only story about sex workers' rights published in LGBTQ and feminist online

media in response to news about the Craigslist Killer — a surprise given pointed attention given to the sex workers' murders in the mainstream press.

There was another lull in coverage between the 2009 *Feministing* guest blog and a sweep of 2010 stories about the Adult Services and Erotic Services forum closures. A story titled “5 things you need to know about the Craigslist Adult Services censor” ran in *Feministing* on Sept. 8, 2010, outlining reasons for Craigslist’s changes to their personal ads forums as well as repudiations against rationale behind the “censor,” as many media referred to it. Writing in favor of sex workers’ rights, the author pointed out that “you can still buy sex online, and in person, for that matter;” “The Craigslist Adult Services section is a red herring in the fight against trafficking, sexual assault, and child abuse;” and “Censuring Craigslist won’t help women, and could actually hurt them, even and especially victims of trafficking.” (“5 things you need to know about the Craigslist Adult Services censor,” Sept. 8, 2010, *Feministing*). Other stories linked to videos of feminists calling Craigslist’s Adult Services removal “misdirected energy,” (“On our radar,” Sept. 11, 2010, *Bitch*), and they editorialized that “it’s hard to believe that purchasers of sex will be deterred by a few moments of googling for Craigslist alternatives” (“Still much ado about Craigslist,” Oct. 1, 2010, *Ms. Magazine*).

However, there were also stories that worked against the dominant feminist discourse that defended sex workers’ autonomy. *Ms. Magazine* linked to an account from a sex worker published on Salon.com. According to author: “Craigslist made it easy — yes, too easy — for a naive woman like me to slide into a dark and illegal lifestyle. In the world of escorting, essentially straight-up prostitution, Craigslist was the Walmart.

Everybody said that,” (“Pole-dancing dolls, sex work during Ramadan and gay Catholic mass: Editors’ picks 9/5 - 9/11,” Sept. 11, 2010, *Ms. Magazine*). Another *Ms. Magazine* story reported on the diverse range of reactions from feminists and activists regarding the Adult Services closure. The reporter wrote:

“I’m sympathetic to the concerns being expressed, particularly skepticism about whether this change will really make much of a difference. But in terms of one basic goal – delegitimizing the rampant commercial sexual exploitation of minor girls in the U.S.–the change on Craigslist is a victory,” (“Craigslist decision is good news for trafficked girls,” Sept. 13, 2010, *Ms. Magazine*).

*Ms. Magazine*’s coverage of this topic was especially inconsistent. Just one month after the previous story ran, yet another *Ms.* writer acknowledged that other websites that would pick up where Craigslist left off in terms of the sex trade (“Sex trafficking: Is there an app for that?,” Oct. 14, 2010, *Ms. Magazine*). It was difficult to determine where many feminist media outlets stood regarding the forum closures, and LGBTQ media remained relatively silent in terms of sex workers’ rights during the months surrounding the Adult Services and Erotic Services closures.

The arguments for and against forum censorship on Craigslist ebbed and flowed through 2010, giving way to more informed analyses in 2011. For instance, a March story in *Feministing* importantly debunked earlier research published by the Women’s Funding Network, which “played such a pivotal role in the shutdown of Craigslist’s Adult Services section last fall and was cited by some of the biggest newspapers in the country” (“Research behind Craigslist Adult Services shutdown debunked,” March 24, 2011,

*Feministing*; As a note, the *Washington Post* also discredited the Women's Funding Network study). Soon after that, *Bitch* began running a first-person blog series called "The H-Word," in which Melissa Petro, the "hooker teacher" described by mainstream news outlets, wrote from "a feminist pro-sex worker (though not necessarily pro-sex work) stance" ("The H-word: What the H?," Oct. 3, 2011, *Bitch*). Before becoming a blogger, Petro used Craigslist to find clients and lost her teaching job for writing about it, so she was especially qualified to discuss Craigslist's forum closures. Petro wrote in one blog that "When I was selling sex on Craigslist, I would never have referred to myself as a prostitute. Somewhat ironically, when soliciting clients I called myself a 'non pro'—short for 'non professional' or 'not a prostitute,'" ("The H-word: Who you calling a hooker?," Nov. 3, 2011, *Bitch*).

As the years wore on, sex workers' rights discourse shifted away from Craigslist forum closures to other topics: the gay sex work industry, for instance. Finally, the LGBTQ press entered the sex workers' rights discussion. In 2013, Out.com reported about a social problem of emerging interest: The ongoing death of porn stars in the sex work community. The story covered Craigslist a site for sex workers' recruitment, and listed it as a marginalizing force. The article quoted a Brooklyn College professor:

"You can enter the industry through Rentboy.com or Craigslist, so you're not connected to others. And you can be emotionally exhausted from the work but can't talk to family and friends about it to decompress. Then you resort to coping tools like drugs and alcohol." ("Why are so many adult film stars dying?," May 9, 2013, Out.com).

*Bitch* followed up on the Rentboy.com discussion in February of 2016, writing that Craigslist's forum closures forced sex workers and their clients to move onto other websites, including Rentboy, myredbook.com, and Backpage ("Digital crackdowns on the sex trade can put sex workers at risk," Feb. 18, 2016, *Bitch*). *Ms.* Magazine further confounded alternative media discourse about sex work on Craigslist. Reporting on "16 global heroes battling violence against women and girls," *Ms.* Magazine identified Malika Saada Saar as one of those heroes. Saar was the human rights lawyer who "led the shutdown of Craigslist's sex ads." She "teamed up with other organizations to draw public attention to the exploitation of fueled by the website's 'adult services' section," ("16 global heroes battling violence against women and girls," Dec. 7, 2015, *Ms.* Magazine). Why Saar would be a hero for feminists or others who value sex workers' rights is not clear from the article.

*Sex workers as subjects.* Although discourse about sex workers' rights wavered between support of Craigslist and disavowal of its sex forums, other stories focused more on the demographics of sex workers who used Craigslist to ply their trades. Trans sex workers received some coverage (a deviation from mainstream news stories, which did not report on trans sex workers at all), as in a 2009 story chastising a Chicago nightclub that imposed ID requirements for "cross-dressing prostitutes" who "were advertising on Craigslist and mentioning the establishment," ("Gay bar ID policy called discriminatory," Sept. 21, 2009, *The Advocate*). Other stories reported on sex workers from social backgrounds that were also reported to national newspaper audiences: teenagers and teachers. For instance there were the "H-Word" columns written for *Bitch* by the "hooker



teacher” Melissa Petro, in which Petro wrote: “Whereas I’d hated my desk job, I hated prostitution even more. After four short months, I quit. I went back to school and became a teacher, a job that I loved,” (“The H-word: She works hard for the money (so you better treat her right),” Oct. 28, 2011, *Bitch*). There were tales of teen sugar babies seeking U.S. citizenship (“Rags to riches via the Web,” Jan. 29, 2007, *The Advocate*) and teen escorts-turned-murderers (“Teen confesses to murder of gay journalist,” March 25, 2009, *The Advocate*). There were also numerous stories about porn stars, a demographic absent from mainstream news coverage. Porn stars could be recruited from Craigslist, leaving behind their careers as teachers and consulate workers, according to Out.com (“The porn problem,” May 9, 2013, Out.com). Although alternative media coverage of sex work on Craigslist was not ideologically consistent, their stories represented more diverse groups of sex workers than did mainstream newspapers.

***Pimps and human traffickers.*** In LGBTQ and feminist media, human traffickers and pimps ( $N = 154$ ) were mentioned with comparable frequency to sex workers and prostitutes ( $N = 149$ ), but human traffickers were covered much more often than pimps (see Table 17). Discourse about pimps and human traffickers peaked in 2010 and 2011, as it did in the national newspaper sample. This peak reflected the proliferation of stories about Craigslist during Adult Services and Erotic Services censorship controversies and stories about political scandals, both of which pointed to Craigslist sex work as threats to public wellbeing. In fact, pimps and human traffickers were never mentioned before 2010 in this sample of LGBTQ and feminist online magazines.

Stories beginning in 2010 described feminist and queer perspectives on pimping

and sex trafficking, most often in conjunction with the Craigslist forum closures described previously. Stories like *Feministing*'s "5 things you need to know about the Craigslist Adult Services censor" (Sept. 8, 2010) discussed different feminists' responses to the Craigslist shutdowns, including a statement made by Melissa Gira on AlterNet, who pointed out that "People involved in the sex trade, whether by choice, coercion or circumstance, all still face criminal records after a prostitution conviction – even people who have been trafficked." Gira's critique described how cops patrol Craigslist and end up punishing sex workers and trafficking victims rather than johns and human traffickers. Other stories from 2010 and 2011 pointed out that censoring Craigslist would not dissuade sex work or sex predators at all. Wrote a reporter for *Ms. Magazine*:

"It's hard to believe that purchasers of sex will be deterred by a few moments of googling for Craigslist alternatives, or that pimps who had no qualms about lying to, raping, kidnapping and abusing teenagers will suddenly be reformed because Adult Services is gone," (Still much ado about Craigslist," Oct. 1, 2010, *Ms. Magazine*).

A 2011 "The H-Word" column written by the "Hooker Teacher" Melissa Petro, argued that "Without our input, even well-meaning feminists get it wrong, misplacing their energies supporting campaigns to shut down strip clubs, fine our employers, and censor cites like Craigslist and Backpage—efforts which only further hinder sex workers' labor processes" ("The H-Word: Who you calling a hooker?," Nov. 3, 2011, *Bitch*). Feminist media at the time did an especially good job calling out pimps and traffickers as the bad guys, while also urging feminists to consider the legal implications of censorship

and forum closures for self-employed sex workers.

However, other feminist media also included cases of victim-blaming, as in the case of stories that suggested prostitutes were the problem on Craigslist. One *Ms.* Magazine story, for instance, made a counter-argument that the online sex industry was objectifying and devaluing women. The writer articulated both sides of the argument: “Anti-trafficking groups are applauding the removal of the ‘erotic services’ section from Craigslist, although sex worker advocates will surely find this development problematic for women who were willingly selling sex on Craigslist.” But she continued with a less objective analysis, outlining her own opinion about the Craigslist forum closures, which follows:

“I am appalled by the commercial sexual exploitation of underaged girls, the trafficking of adult women and female objectification represented in the sale of women’s bodies. Therefore, I think it’s a good thing that girls and women will no longer be openly sold side by side with bicycles, cars and stereo systems on Craigslist” (“Craigslist decision is good news for trafficked girls” Sept. 13, 2010, *Ms. Magazine*)

The writer calcified the rift between feminists who support autonomous sex workers and those who see Craigslist as a tool for the exploitation of minors and vulnerable women. I was surprised not to see feminist media take a more explicit position supporting sex workers who use the Web to solicit johns.

Although feminist media were certainly more vocal about the sex forum closures and their relationships to exploitation than were LGBTQ publications, there were a

handful of mentions of pimps and trafficking in Out.com, *The Advocate*, and Pride.com, and some alternative media outlets reported about sex workers beyond the Adult Services and Erotic Services closures. One piece in the feminist outlet *Ms. Magazine* linked Craigslist trafficking with the Long Island Serial Killer described in the newspaper sample. *Ms. Magazine* reported in spring 2011 that a series of bodies found in New York “have the characteristics of trafficking victims—those who are forced or scammed into the service of another for labor or commercial sex.” A forensics consultant on the case was quoted as saying that the victims were drawn to New York “through the same mechanism—posting on Craigslist for prostitution. Like a funnel that brought them there,” (“Long Island murders: Sex trafficking ring involved?,” April 25, 2011, *Ms. Magazine*). This story and others solidified Craigslist’s reputation for danger among LGBTQ and feminist readers.

Counter to alternative media’s activist agenda, some stories also contributed to stereotypes of LGBTQ people as sexual predators. A 2012 story reported that “An Atlanta drag performer has been sentenced to up to 30 years in prison in a human trafficking case that’s shedding light on the young LGBT victims of sexual violence” (“Drag performer gets prison time for pimping kids,” March 8, 2012, *The Advocate*). While the victims were LGBTQ people, so was the perpetrator. This story contributed to old-school stereotypes that drag queens are perverts or pedophiles. Further, stories such as “Sex trafficked girls: What’s the story in N.Y., Mich., and Minn?” (Aug. 17, 2010, *Ms. Magazine*) cited studies about sex trafficking that were later proven to include misleading data, such as statistics about the child sex trade and sex trafficking at the Super Bowl in

Miami that year. That article reported that:

“... a Schapiro Group study [PDF] sponsored by the Women’s Funding Network (WFN) showed that Craigslist ads were still selling hundreds of girls. Another recent WFN study of sex-trafficked girls in New York, Michigan and Minnesota showed the same. Advocates for commercially sexually exploited girls like Rachel Lloyd of Girls Educational & Mentoring Services (GEMS) in New York, A Future. Not a Past. in Georgia, and change.org, among others, continued to pressure Craigslist to remove the ‘adult services’ section of the website.”

Representing a shift in discourse that blamed Craigslist for the victimization of women and children, a *Feministing* story reported months later that *The Village Voice* had debunked “the Women’s Funding Network (WFN) sex trafficking study that played such a pivotal role in the shutdown of Craigslist’s Adult Services section last fall and was cited by some of the biggest newspapers in the country,” (Research Behind Craigslist Adult Services Shutdown Debunked,” March 24, 2011, *Feministing*). Although stories in the mainstream newspaper sample reported on the Women’s Funding Network study, *Ms. Magazine* was the only outlet in the alternative media sample to cite the research. And *Feministing* was the only outlet to report on its inaccuracy. (However, the *Washington Post* also reported the original study and its correction).

Stories across feminist and LGBTQ media more often focused on the controversies surrounding pimps and traffickers on Craigslist than on naming actual pimps and traffickers who were apprehended by police. This illustrates a problem in describing sexual subjects: While prostitutes and sex workers were described as individuals —

sometimes validated, other times villainized — pimps and traffickers were framed as anonymous, nameless forces. Their individual identities were rarely described in LGBTQ and feminist online magazines, while mainstream newspapers tended to report their names when they were arrested for criminal offenses. In LGBTQ and feminist online magazines, the blame continually fell on Craigslist rather than on the particular people who enslave and manipulate women and children through the sex trade.

***Violent crime.*** Like the national newspaper sample, LGBTQ and feminist media provided coverage of violent crimes related to Craigslist sex forums. These stories included references to the Craigslist Killer — that blonde-haired, blue-eyed medical student from Boston. Like some of the above discourse about sex work, stories about violent crime sometimes provided a voice for sex workers who were at risk in the Craigslist marketplace. A story from *Feministing* in 2010 featured a guest post penned by Audicia Ray, a sex worker who delivered a speech to the International Day To End Violence Against Sex Workers event at the Metropolitan Community Church in New York City:

“Last April, while I was at the grocery store shopping for the meal I was cooking for the first crop of Speak Up sex worker media trainees, my phone buzzed and I got a message that a sex worker from New York had been found dead – bound and shot in the chest – in a hotel in Boston. The message was from a fellow sex worker who urged me to spread the word around and encourage other sex workers I know to be extra-diligent with their screening. Sex workers look out for each other – the community was responding to each other and the news media before the media

even understood the developing story.

The case was big news for a few weeks, as the so-called Craigslist Killer went on a bit of a spree and then was revealed to be a clean cut Boston University medical student. Everyone freaked out about the dangers of internet prostitution...,” (Guest post: International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers: My thoughts,” Dec. 17, 2009, *Feministing*).

Other articles reported in a more traditional tone, using reportorial objectivity and a removed point of view, as in this story about the Craigslist Adult Services censor. “(The censor) also comes in the wake of the highly publicized so-called “Craigslist killer” case,” *Feministing* reported, “in which a Boston University medical student allegedly hired a prostitute via the site and went on a murderous crime and gambling spree, later committing suicide in jail.” (“5 things you need to know about the Craigslist Adult Services Censor,” Sept. 8, 2010, *Feministing*).

But the Craigslist Killer from Boston was not the only Craigslist Killer mentioned in the coverage. There was the Long Island Killer who was sought in the mysterious disappearances and deaths of multiple New York City sex workers (“Long Island murders: Sex trafficking ring involved?,” April 25, 2011, *Ms. Magazine*). There was the teenage boy who brutally murdered his high-profile journalist client after for-profit exchanges (“Teen confesses to murder of gay journalist,” March 25, 2009, *The Advocate*; “Gay journalist-killing teen gets 25 to life,” Dec. 14, 2011, *The Advocate*). And in news of the bizarre, there was “the case of a Craigslist escort accused of strangling a retired Bank of America executive in the San Francisco area and setting his house on fire in

order to steal items including a solid gold flute,” (“Escort on trial for killing client,” Sept. 22, 2010, *The Advocate*). Like national newspapers, LGBTQ and feminist publications focused on those “Holy Shit!” stories described in Michael Schudson’s *Making the News* (2003).

***Cyberbullying and cyber-harassment.*** There were also stories about cyberbullying and online-mediated threats of violence to LGBTQ and feminist readers as they used Craigslist sex forums. A story in *The Advocate* wavered between humor and reportage as it described a cybercrime among colleagues at a Southern California food manufacturer:

“An unnamed plaintiff claiming he was harassed by coworkers soliciting gay sex for him on Craigslist is suing the classified ads site and his employer, food products giant Foster Farms.

The plaintiff, who works at a dairy farm in Southern California, said his coworkers posted the ads in the site’s casual encounters section, including the following post on March 16, 2009.

The ad reads, ‘Seeking a hot stud for first timer ... recently divorced from my wife, have come to terms with my homo sexuality [sic], and need someone to teach me the right way, and be gentle at the same time, age, race not important ...’” (“Straight guy sues Craigslist says coworkers solicited gay sex for him, March 6, 2010, *The Advocate*).

Other stories contained troublesome headlines about intentional rapes arranged through Craigslist. One news roundup proclaimed “A man used Craigslist to arrange to



have his wife raped,” (“Weekly feminist reader,” June. 7, 2009, *Feministing*). Another article years later relayed that a pro-fat activist was threatened through Craigslist after she released a film called “Fattitude.” Regarding the filmmaker, *Bitch* reported that “Someone went so far as to make a fake Craigslist personal ad from Averill that listed her full home address and asked for people to come over and fulfill her ‘fantasies of being violently sexually assaulted,’” (“Trolls don’t just want to be rude — they want power over us,” May 21, 2014, *Bitch*). A 2015 piece published in *The Advocate* described sexuality-based discrimination and cyber-harassment on Craigslist. A woman’s ex-boyfriend reportedly “posted an intimate picture of her on Craigslist along with her name, address, and a request for a rough role-play ‘rape’ fantasy,” *The Advocate* reported. “Several men tried to break into her home.” (“For Tyler: How one man is taking on cyber-bullies,” Oct. 8, 2015, *The Advocate*). The story also noted that when the victim turned to police for assistance, they told her to stay off the Internet.

LGBTQ and feminist online magazines’ coverage of sex work and sex crimes flip-flopped between pro-sex work discourse and pro-Adult Services and Erotic Services censorship discourse, creating a tension between political values in the LGBTQ and feminist communities. Alternative media catalyzed the notion that Craigslist is indeed a dangerous place, especially for sex workers, LGBTQ people, and women.

**Law and regulation.** With less frequency than the national newspaper sample (19.3%), LGBTQ and feminist online magazines also covered Law and Regulation stories (13.8%), especially those related to the Craigslist Adult Services and Erotic Services shutdowns, described at length in this chapter’s Sex Work and Sex Crimes

section. Like reportage about the Craigslist censors in mainstream national newspapers, there were stories about lawmakers putting the pressure on Craigslist. Reported *The Advocate*:

“The move came after a group of 17 attorneys general sent a letter to the Craigslist management ordering it to take down its adult services section. Now the website shows a black ‘censored’ bar over the space once occupied by “adult services.” (“Craigslist axes ‘Adult Services’ in the US,” Sept. 16, 2010, *The Advocate*).

There were many stories that discussed the impacts of Craigslist’s legal crackdowns on sex workers. Those articles have been discussed at length in previous sections, so I will not outline them in more detail here.

Other Law & Regulation stories included those about police officers surveilling Craigslist for sex workers (“Digital crackdowns on the sex trade can put sex workers at risk,” Feb. 18, 2016, *Bitch*); teachers being sued for sex ads on Craigslist (“Teacher loses appeal over Craigslist ad,” May 6, 2011, *The Advocate*); Canadian laws limiting the legality of sex work and advertising for sex online (“Sad day for #RightsNotRescue in Canada,” Nov. 7, 2014, *Feministing*); and joint custody laws in cases of Craigslist-based sperm donation (“Lesbian mother stalked by sperm donor,” Sept. 14, 2010, *The Advocate*), a recurring theme in the LGBTQ and feminist sample that was not seen in the national newspaper sample. One notable difference was the relative frequency of police sting stories published across the two samples. They were a common story angle in the national newspapers, but very little straight reportage on stings ran in the LGBTQ and

feminist online magazines. Those stories that did run were about stings that snared misbehaving politicians, or they were critical pieces that analyzed why stings were *really* being conducted online, as in “Digital crackdowns on the sex trade can put sex workers at risk,” a story published in *Bitch* in February 2016.

**Related media.** More so than the national newspaper sample, LGBTQ and feminist online magazines covered media related to Craigslist and fine arts that utilized Craigslist as a tool for artistic production. Related Media was the primary topic of 13.1% of stories in the LGBTQ and feminist online magazines. This was an interesting area of coverage because related media were treated as especially central to the lives of LGBTQ and feminist readers, and to the culture they participate in. Related Media stories didn’t just discuss Craigslist’s online sex ad competitors, i.e. BackPage.com or the Village Voice. They described theater performances and comedy of relevance to queer and feminist communities.

A theater review in *The Advocate*’s online A&E section described a Chicago comedy event, for instance, in a review called “No fats, no femmes: Tales of dialing-up, coming out & getting off.” The entire review reads:

“After his successful solo debut this past spring, gay writer-performer Tim Paul returns to Chicago’s Annoyance Theatre to clear his Internet history with a new one-man show opening July 24. With a Kleenex box at the ready, the raconteur explores his online etiquette and shortcomings as he shares anecdotes about his sordid experiences cruising sites such as Craigslist, Manhunt, and Bear411.” (“Hot sheet,” July 22, 2011, *The Advocate*).

Other stories described films, TV programs, and theater events that also utilized Craigslist as a central plot element. There was a recap of an episode of HBO's hit series "GIRLS" in which the lead character, Hannah, is asked by her editor to write a story about one of two scenarios: "either having a threesome with people she's met off Craigslist or doing a bunch of coke" ("Girls, Girls, Girls: The 'Bad Friend' episode recap," Jan. 28, 2013, *Bitch*). Another story reported on a painter who drew his inspiration from his experiences cruising Craigslist. Reported a writer for Out.com:

"When he wasn't looking at art, Chmielinski was checking out guys on Craigslist. 'You can imagine the kind of chats and pictures I logged from the web,' he says. 'I was presenting myself online as a face without a body. And then you look at my paintings from that time, and they're all pedestaled visages. The body became an eruption of paint. I was completely stuck at the neck,'" ("From Craigslist to the A list, a young artist comes of age," May 21, 2013, Out.com)

There were the comic book auteurs who were praised in their approach to sex ed but who "talked rather smugly about turning tricks in a stranger's apartment using Craigslist," ("Rejoice! There's a New Sex-Ed Comic Book," Sept. 16, 2013, *Bitch*). There was the photo artist who developed an exhibit about his father's HIV death. Reported Out.com:

"'I am looking for men who had sex with my dad,' reads Oli Rodriguez's ad on Craigslist and DaddyHunt. 'He was known as Troy, Peter, Pedro, and other aliases in the late '70s/'80s/early '90s, before his death from complications of AIDS in '93. I'm his son and I want to hook up with you,'" ("Artist Oli Rodriguez: Son seeking Papi," April 24, 2014, Out.com).

While Rodriguez only received responses from two men who once knew his father, he developed a “haunting” exhibit, which ran at Chicago Arts Coalition. A similar story in *The Advocate* reported that a transgender painter recruited their paintings’ subjects from Craigslist (“The Bay Area body,” June 6, 2014, *The Advocate*).

Of course, there were also ample stories in gay media about related gay dating and cruising apps — Manhunt.net, Adam4Adam.com, and DudesNude.com — which referenced Craigslist as a cousin in the market. And there were the announcements of related applications such as 3nder “pronounced ‘threender,’” which “promises ‘threesomes made easy.’” According to Out.com, “The app, helps Ménage à Trois minded singles and couples find each other. Besides being a godsend for people tired of using Craigslist to make it happen, 3nder is LGBTQ inclusive,” (“Jason Collins debuts in first home game, likely to get second 10-day contract ... And 5 other things you need to know today,” March 3, 2014, Out.com). Regardless of whether LGBTQ and feminist online magazines described Craigslist as a focal point for art or as a less-desirable alternative to other dating platforms, stories were attentive to the ways that LGBTQ folks and feminists rely on Craigslist in their everyday lives.

**Scandal.** LGBTQ and feminist online magazines published about social and political scandal with almost exactly the same frequency (12.3%) as mainstream U.S. newspapers (12.1%). Congressman Chris Lee, whose shirtless Craigslist ad for a female sex partner made headlines and shamed the married politician, was the focus of coverage. *The Advocate* aggregated offhanded remarks about Chris Lee appearing in *Playgirl* magazine, quoting a *Playgirl* staffer who told another magazine that, “We’re currently

putting together a shoot of hot daddies (DILFS) and I think Chris would make a great centerfold for that issue,” (“Playgirl wants Rep Chris Lee,” March 4, 2011, *The Advocate*). Stories such as this one also reported on part of the Chris Lee scandal that mainstream newspaper didn’t cover: that Lee was specifically seeking transgender women on Craigslist (“Craigslist Rep. wanted trans women,” Feb 24, 2011, *The Advocate*). They also reported that Lee was outed by a Black woman — another detail national newspapers failed to mention (“Race card: Why it matters that a Black woman exposed Chris Lee,” Feb. 14, 2011, *Bitch*). This is important because these articles represent diverse voices not privileged by hegemonic mainstream news.

Other scandal stories covered the gruesome murder of a prominent journalist by a teenaged sex worker (“Teen confesses to murder of gay journalist,” March 23, 2009, *The Advocate*), and multiple stories reported about teachers who lost their jobs because they historically used Craigslist to seek either casual sex or to arrange for-profit encounters (“Appeals Court: School right to fire teacher seeking sex on Craigslist,” April 6, 2011, *The Advocate*; “The H-Word: What the H?,” Oct. 2, 2011, *Bitch*). Another narrative missing from the national newspaper sample was the story of Indiana representative Phillip Hinkle, who hired an 18-year-old male sex worker on Craigslist. Reported the *The Advocate*:

“A married lawmaker from Indiana with an antigay voting record has found himself caught up in a scandal involving a young man he allegedly met through Craigslist. The Indianapolis Star is reporting that state representative Phillip Hinkle, 64, who represents portions of Pike and Wayne townships, answered an

ad on Craigslist placed by a young man looking for a ‘sugga daddy,’ and offered the young man \$80 plus tip to spend time with him at a local hotel. The young man, identified as Kameryn Gibson, 18, says he ended up with more than \$80,” (“Gay e-mail ‘shakedown’ entangles Indiana Rep. Phillip Hinkle,” Aug. 12, 2011, *The Advocate*).

Unlike newspapers, LGBTQ online publications were especially careful to note that politicians caught up in Craigslist-mediated sex scandals often had anti-gay voting records.

**Public health and business and economy.** Although politics, media, and scandal had relatively equal prominence as story topics in the LGBTQ and feminist online magazines, public health and business stories were almost never featured. While public health discussions (especially about HIV and AIDS) popped up occasionally in stories about other Craigslist-related topics, health was rarely the primary topic of coverage. One story about HIV/AIDS described Craigslist as a site for public health interventions in the Appalachian foothills of North Carolina (“Thinking outside the box,” Sept. 27, 2011, *The Advocate*). Other stories asked about STI etiquette on Craigslist sex forums. However, none reported on Craigslist as a petri dish for HIV acquisition, as did some of the mainstream U.S. newspaper stories.

Business & Economy stories, which comprised 3.2% of the national newspaper sample, did not appear at all in the LGBTQ and feminist sample.

## Conclusions

LGBTQ and feminist online magazines covered the same topics as national newspapers, with the exception of Business & Economy stories, which were not part of LGBTQ and feminist media's editorial mix. Like U.S. newspapers, LGBTQ and feminist media emphasized Craigslist's utility for the sex trade, but they additionally emphasized the cultural relevance of Craigslist for readers. In a departure from trends observed in national newspapers, Online Dating stories appeared more often than stories about Sex Work & Sex Crimes. Stories about Online Dating especially emphasized the ways that queer communities and women use Craigslist as part of their searches for casual sex, monogamous or polyamorous romantic relations, and sperm donor searches. Stories in alternative news outlets were more accepting of Craigslist's utility for readers, but they were simultaneously skeptical about the safety and legality of activity on the website.

Stories in the LGBTQ and feminist online magazine sample used contrasting discourses about Craigslist, which wavered between lighthearted joking and sharp criticism. Early stories poked fun at gay men who cruised Craigslist at the expense of their sex lives, and later coverage included Q&A columns about best practices for using HIV-related slang on the forums. These stories hinted at the intimate relationship between young gay men and online-mediated sexuality. On the other hand, there were stories that identified Craigslist as a space for dangerous social pariahs — teen murderers, serial killers, and the like. Feminist publications also notably produced competing messages about the Craigslist Adult Services and Erotic Services forum closures. While most stories endeavored to support sex workers and dissuade sex trafficking, *Ms.*



Magazine established its firm “pro-forum closure” position despite sex workers blogging for other publications that the censors were harmful to independent sex workers’ business models and to sex workers’ rights at large. Further, the blame continued to be placed on sex workers using Craigslist rather than on their johns or their pimps, who received relatively little media attention in LGBTQ and feminist online magazines in comparison to the mainstream U.S. newspaper sample. It is also interesting that much of the pro-sex worker discourse appeared in first-person columns, editorials, or humor pieces, which comprised 30% ( $N=39$ ) of the stories published in this sample, compared with 13.6% ( $N=38$ ) of the stories published in the national newspaper sample. LGBTQ and feminist online magazines also aggregated content from other outlets regularly, while newspapers ran stories from news wires such as the Associated Press and Reuters.

By covering topics such as political scandals, sex work, and violent crime, LGBTQ and feminist online magazines contributed to normalizing discourse about Craigslist sex forums, essentially replicating the same topical coverage as national newspapers. Further, nearly half of all stories about Craigslist sex forums were published between 2010 - 2011, meaning LGBTQ and feminist media focused even more on sex forum closures and political scandals of those years than did national newspapers, whose coverage was distributed more evenly throughout the years covered. Theoretically, we may have expected vernacular media to cover technologies relevant to readers with more breadth and depth than the mainstream press. Although LGBTQ and feminist publications featured marginalized voices in stories that national newspapers sourced using bureaucratic officials and police officers, their messages were confounding:

Craigslist is at once a dangerous haven for sex workers and an essential element to the sex lives of Internet-using LGBTQ people and feminists. These competing narratives point to ideological inconsistencies among alternative media that claim to represent the interests of marginalized readers. They also suggest that alternative media — despite providing *more* sex-positive, sex worker-positive, pro-Internet content — are not immune to limitations on content infused by the news net or by journalistic norms of content production.

As this research proceeds with an analysis of Craigslist sex forums during the news coverage period, I will call out stories that are missing from both newspapers' and LGBTQ and feminist magazines' editorial content. Although sex workers and HIV-positive men are indeed visible communities on Craigslist sex forums, other marginalized groups — such as kink and poly communities, fetishists, gender-non-binary people, non-identifying LGBTQ people (such as “str8” men), and racial minorities — are equally important to the milieu of the forums. However, many of these groups were barely represented or symbolically annihilated in Craigslist coverage — both in mainstream newspapers and in the alternative LGBTQ and feminist press.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **User Activity on Casual Encounters Personal Ad Forums, 2003 - 2016**

In the 17 years since Craigslist opened its forums to Internet users across the United States, the website has developed a culture unique to the communities it serves, including many marginalized groups of sexual minorities. The Casual Encounters forums allow users freedom of sexual expression that transcends the identifiable conditions of competing online dating platforms, which link online daters with their offline selves by integrating mandatory photos or links to social media pages. Craigslist offers a less regulated space for LGBTQ people, non-monogamous people, kink and fetish communities, and other sexual outsiders to interact without judgment. Due to the anonymity of Craigslist forum posts, users have fewer pretensions of or expectations for moralism and inhibition in personal ad content.

Men, women, and gender-non-binary people use Craigslist's Casual Encounters forums to mediate sexual fantasy and organize in-person sexual encounters. To do so, they rely on a complex vernacular language that signifies their sexual relationship preferences in headlines and personal ad copy. By partnering slang terms with acronyms commonly used among sexually active online communities, posters self-identify their demographic and psychographic qualities, as well as their marital statuses, sexual orientations, body sizes, and gender identities. They use the same coded language to identify preferred qualities in the partners they seek online. Casual Encounters posts

allow marginalized communities to communicate about their sexual desires and fantasies, while exploring the simple possibility of meeting in real life (IRL).

Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 demonstrated that domestic news outlets frame Craigslist users as sexual Others. Mainstream U.S. newspapers and LGBTQ and feminist online magazines portrayed Craigslist's users as prostitutes and pimps, violent criminals, scandalous politicians, and promiscuous queer people interested in casual hookups. This chapter confirms the presence of LGBTQ people and sex workers on Craigslist, while simultaneously calling out the quotidian realities of sex sought through online forums. I observe the pervasiveness of internalized homophobia and sexual shame present among Craigslist-using populations while problematizing the ideological underpinnings of the culture developed in these barely regulated online spaces: One which is overtly misogynistic, hetero-masculinist, and sexually objectifying. Although Craigslist Casual Encounters forums have historically fostered some illegal activity (most notably: sex work and drug exchanges), they are not the nefarious criminal hubs portrayed by the mainstream and alternative press. This chapter identifies the sexual out-groups that converge on Craigslist sex forums and describes how they use online media to foster explorative sexual discourse.

To accomplish these goals, I followed a very similar methodology as used in the mass media analyses presented in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4. I used critical discourse analysis and first- and second-cycle coding to analyze 298 Casual Encounters personal ads posted to Craigslist between 2003 and 2016. Ads were sampled from New York City on July 31, 2003, Los Angeles on January 16, 2009, and Chicago on December 21, 2016.

These cities and dates were selected for analysis because they reflected cities represented in Chapter 3's mainstream newspaper sample, they represented the breadth of Craigslist's lifespan, and they represented Craigslist forums archived by the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine. Because Craigslist deletes personal ads within seven-to-45 days of their original posted date (Craigslist, 2017), researchers must use convenience sampling to access Casual Encounters posts archived by third-party organizations such as the Internet Archive. I analyzed 98 personal ads from Chicago, 100 personal ads from Los Angeles, and 100 personal ads from New York City. Although body copy was available for most ads sampled from New York City and Chicago, the Internet Archive only preserved headlines from the Los Angeles sample. Thus the data sampled from Los Angeles is not as robust as that sampled from the two other cities. I analyzed the ads by theme and by timeframe. Coding was conducted in NVivo. I used the eclectic coding procedure outlined in Chapter 2.

Throughout this chapter, I frequently refer to personal ads as they were posted to the Casual Encounters forums. In the interest of providing my readers with a glimpse into the particularities of Craigslist discourse, I have not edited the posts for grammar, spelling, or readability. When interpretation is necessary, I decipher acronyms and slang words that are critical to the reader's understanding, but I do so before or after quoted material is introduced. This approach retains the original linguistic patterns of Craigslist-mediated discourse.

## **The Culture of Casual Encounters**

Craigslist's Casual Encounters user demographics skew male, young-to-middle aged, and white. Of 298 posts analyzed in this sample, 227 (76.2%) were made by men, 45 posts (15.1%) were made by women, nine were made by transgender people (3%), and 13 (4.4%) were made by couples — both male-female and male-male, but not female-female. The remaining four posts did not disclose the poster's gender identity. Posters reported their ages as between 18 and 59 years old, with 223 people (74.8%) listing their specific ages. Of the 223 posts with ages listed, 63 (28.3%) were made by people between 18 and 25 years old, 110 (49.3%) were made by people between 26 and 35 years old, 32 (14.3%) were made by people between 36 and 45 years old, and 18 (8.1%) were made by people between 46 and 59. Although most posters ( $n = 232$ ; 77.9%) did not self-disclose their race or ethnicity, those that did ( $n = 75$ ) predominantly identified as white ( $n = 51$ ; 68%), followed by Black or mixed race ( $n = 11$ ; 14.7%), Latino ( $n = 4$ ; 5.3%), and Asian ( $n = 1$ ; 1.3%). It is important that posters disclosed their identity markers by choice, so user demographics were reliable only insofar that the posters reported their online identities in ways that were congruent with their offline identities. (For instance, many posters may have reported that they are a few years younger than their true age).

Gay men and LGBTQ-curious people were overrepresented in Casual Encounters forums compared to the general population. Of the 298 posts, 73 (24.5%) were made by men seeking men and 27 (9%) were made by men seeking transgender partners or transgender people seeking men. However, only five posts (1.7%) were made by women seeking women. Non-monogamous people also made use of the Casual Encounters

forums, with 26 (8.7%) of the ads seeking or advertising threesomes, group sex, or swinging encounters. The remaining ads were made by individuals seeking heterosexual encounters; 123 ads (41.3%) were written by individual men seeking women, and 38 (12.8%) were made by women seeking men. Seven ads (2.3%) did not list the gender of the poster or the preferred gender of their sex partners.

On Casual Encounters forums across the country, young straight men mingle with the women brave enough to participate, and queer and bi-curious men pursue each other with a particular variety of machismo. On Craigslist these people build a vocabulary and culture all their own. Forum posters reflect their IRL cultures and ideological positions while exploring sexuality in an unregulated, decontextualized digital environment. Craigslist's culture is defined by its communities' language, poster behaviors, poster identities, and poster ideologies.

**Vernacular language.** Craigslist is rife with forum-specific terminology that necessitates translation for the lay reader. In this chapter, I refer to the coded language on Craigslist as "Craigslist Speak." Craigslist Speak is defined by a series of acronyms, slang terms, and symbols sometimes unintelligible to outsiders. Upon entering a Casual Encounters forum, a visitor will be greeted by an alphabet soup of sexual solicitations. A personal ad headline might read "MWM seeks GAM for N\$A clean fun," for instance. While a novice may lean on UrbanDictionary.com for help parsing through the gobbledygook, a Craigslist veteran quickly ascertains that a married white male seeks a gay Asian male for paid casual sex provided both parties are HIV and sexually transmitted infection (STI) free. This section outlines themes in recurrent terms found

throughout Casual Encounters ads sampled in New York City, Los Angeles, and Chicago. I call out qualitatively meaningful terms (e.g. D/D Free) under individual subheadings while providing context for extremely common acronyms (e.g. MBM, SWF) within relevant descriptions of ad content.

***Building trust.*** In the world of Craigslist forums, online fantasies can seamlessly translate into offline meetings. Forum users spend ample time and energy trying to improve their chances of meeting a safe, reliable sex partner. Trust-building language is embedded into forum posts in order to establish factors such as a potential partner's sexual health status, physical attractiveness, and social acceptability.

*Clean and D/D free.* Across the sampled cities and time periods, two terms were used to establish the sexual health status of Casual Encounters posters. People used either “D/D free” (“drug and disease free”) or “clean” to announce their sexual viability to potential partners. There is no way to verify whether people who claim to be D/D free or clean have recently tested negative for HIV or STIs, but the terms appear in a great majority of posts across the sample. Wrote a married black man in New York City in 2003, clarifying his own disease status and his preference for a partner:

“28 yo MBM, D/D-free, 5'8, 187 lbs, fun-loving, energetic, sexually-experimental and unselfish lover looking for a lady to spoil with drinks and dinners, and enjoy safe, responsible NSA relief of mutual sexual frustration. Please be 18-35 years of age, D/D-free...” (NYC)

On the same day, a 34-year-old man wrote that he was “34, 5'8", 150lbs, 31" waist, Italian, clean cut, squeaky clean” (NYC). While most users favor a simple acronym, one



New York City man spelled it out explicitly: "...responsible, drug and disease free. Please be the same..." (NYC).

Years later in Chicago, iterations of "D/D free" were still being used. In 2016, men in Chicago wrote that they were "real, disease free, and clean" (Chicago) and "safe, sane, responsible, discreet and absolutely ddf," (Chicago). Others sought partners who were D/D free but they did not disclose their own STI status, as with this post seeking a long-term relationship with a transgender woman: "I am looking for a D/D free TS/TV for a LTR," (Chicago). One Casual Encounters poster emphasized his interest in STI-negative partners who used condoms: "SAFE PROTECTED SEX ONLY. ! I'm disease-free. You must be as well. Pictures are a must because I'm not into blind dates." (Chicago; typos original in all quotations). No headlines sampled from Los Angeles included "D/D free" or "clean" verbiage, but a quick scroll through headlines on proximal dates reveals a number of posts self-identifying and pursuing partners with negative STI statuses.

*Photo verification.* In addition to establishing expectations for sexual health, Craigslist users also hope to verify the identities of prospective partners before meeting them. Many forum posts expedite the identification process, asking for pictures in e-mail responses from potential suitors. In the early days of Craigslist, posters would ask readers to "send a pic and describe what you'd like to do" (NYC), for instance. New York City posters in 2003 offered "pic for pic thnxs" (NYC) or emphasized their authenticity by writing "No games, let's trade pics..." (NYC).

By 2009, Los Angeles-area Craigslist users were exploiting photo sharing norms, with posts seeking and offering more interactive image experiences. Wrote a 23-year-old man looking for a male buddy to chat with: “do you have a gf ? lets talk about our girlfriend 's. i have reg pics - m4m - 23” (LA). The exchange of photos between two men may allow for easy homoerotic experiences that don’t physically threaten heterosexual relationships with wives or girlfriends. Another Los Angeles ad evidenced the utility of webcams for similar purposes. A 26-year-old man wrote that he was “lookin for mutual webcam masturbation... - m4w - 26 - (sgv)” (LA), but his headline did not indicate any interest in an IRL sex partner.

Posts written in Chicago in 2016 perpetuated trends seen in New York City in 2003 and in Los Angeles in 2009, but they included more creative uses of photo verification beyond confirmation of a respondent’s “realness.” For instance, a young Chicago woman instructed male suitors to “Only respond with a picture, if you are fit and good looking, and if can treat ladies nicely!” (Chicago), assuming that a picture would weed unsavory men out. In-demand Craigslist users request photos to select potential partners from the deluge of e-mails they receive for certain advertised services, like threesomes. (Posts involving women likely receive many more responses than those from men alone. On OkCupid, women receive between one and 25 messages per week based on their attractiveness, while men receive zero-to-three messages depending on how attractive they are (Rudder, 2014)) A Chicago man posted in 2016 indicating that he and his girlfriend were seeking a third partner for sex play:

“Looking for younger guy to fuck bbw gf - mw4m (Aurora) hide this posting age: 26 Mid 20s couple looking for an 18-21 yr old to fuck her while he watches. She's very kinky and fun. If you can host that's a plus. Looking for soon. Send over a face pic so she can pick who she wants. Thanks” (Chicago).

Photo verification is also used to screen sex workers. This tactic can be used by everyday johns and police officers, which makes photo exchange risky for Craigslist users engaged in illegal activities. As an example, a man in the Midway area of Chicago wrote an ad asking to select a sex worker based on her personal photo and a brief bio. The ad was titled “Young and wild”:

“Hey! I'm a white male. I'm 6'0 feet, 195 lbs. I'd love to meet some young girls! I'm real, disease free, and clean. Lets talk about our NEED\$ I am 100% real... send a photo and tell me about you. Let's set a suck and fuck session” (Chicago)

Although there was no telling whether the above ad was written by a real John or by a police officer, it included a noticeable marker used among those seeking play-for-pay on Craigslist: the dollar-sign in replacement of an S. “NEED\$” represents the poster’s willingness to pay money for sex. A sex worker may choose to respond with her photo, but that would put her at risk for identification by police officers surveilling the forums.

***Selecting for physical appearance.*** Mimicking requests for drug-and-disease free partners who will verify their identities with a picture, posters use Craigslist Speak to indicate their own physical characteristics and the qualities they seek in their partners. There are a handful of code words and acronyms used to describe preferred physical characteristics. Posts most commonly refer to their author being “attractive,” “VGL,”

“sexy,” or “hot.” Although there is no way to authenticate a potential partner’s attractiveness without sharing a picture or meeting in person, sales pitches for handsome and beautiful people litter the Craigslist boards. A poster that writes about his or her own attractiveness may be more likely to attract more interested parties, and thus they may have more selectivity over the e-mails they receive hoping to arrange dates or casual sex. For instance, an ad titled “Man 4 Woman 4 NSA Fun NOW” was written by a 34-year-old New Yorker. Although his post lacked any substantial details about his physical appearance, it read:

“Very attractive, sexy, hung man in the Great Neck/Manhasset/Port Washington area is looking to play right now - tonight - with an attractive lady.” (NYC)”

The ad is clear: The poster thinks of himself as good looking, well endowed, and worthy of an equally attractive playmate. Ads posted years later in Los Angeles and Chicago echoed similar verbiage. An L.A. post from 2009 advertised an “Attractive and thin female...” (LA), while a post from Chicago in 2016 began with this title: “Attractive, Well Hung Male Seeking FWB.” The man, seeking a “friend with benefits,” wrote:

“Hey there. I'm a fit, well hung, attractive, easy going guy who's looking for a woman to spend some of my free time with and have some no-strings attached fun.” (Chicago)

What being “attractive” means to an individual on Craigslist is obviously up to the user’s discretion. Ads written by attractive men and women seeking attractive men and women function as a tool to pre-filter the pool of potential suitors. However, most posts written by self-described “attractive” people were ambiguous. It seems that the posts’ authors

hoped to protect their identities while assuring their potential partners that they weren't bad looking. This is because they were seeking similarly attractive partners among the countless, faceless Craigslist users. Posts were tinged with cautious optimism, as expressed by this young man seeking other young men for casual sex: "Sexy outgoing guy looking for same" (LA).

*Selecting for social acceptability.* While some posters use Craigslist Speak to filter for attractive partners, others use Craigslist Speak to filter for partners who won't raise eyebrows on the streets or in the sheets. Posts use language that identifies the poster or their preferred mate as "regular," "typical," or "normal." This verbiage selects for posters who are average looking or who are not sex workers or habitual hook-up artists. As early as 2003, ads from New York seemed to combat the public perception of Craigslist as a seedy street corner or breeding ground for sexual and romantic desperation. Headlines included those from a 35-year-old "regular guy seeking closeness with regular woman" (NYC) and a 38-year-old "Typical male" who sought a "casual encounter with sexy young female." Others were more blunt, specifying: "No psychos, or gold diggers. Send a pic and describe what you'd like to do" (NYC).

Posts from L.A. in 2009 and Chicago in 2016 also used phrasing that emphasized the posters' "normal" qualities or their unexceptional preferences for partners. "Goodlooking guy seeking a nice and normal girl" (LA) wrote a 38-year-old man in Los Angeles. "Mature, average dad type with average dad build," wrote a Chicago man seeking a man-on-man encounter. Although the sex acts desired by Casual Encounters posters may indeed extend beyond the ordinary (as in the case of the "average dad"

seeking a male partner), articulating one's ordinariness is not necessarily considered a hindrance in Craigslist communities. The security of the ordinary gives posters the peace of mind that offline meetings won't put them face-to-face with a Craigslist Killer, a sex worker, or a serial rapist.

*The language of sex work.* That said, a small contingent of Casual Encounters posts articulated their authors' interest in sex work. This was the focus of news coverage described in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, but sex work showed up only sporadically in the Casual Encounters ads sampled from New York City, Los Angeles, and Chicago. Most notable was the amount of terminological gymnastics both sex workers and johns used to avoid breaking Craigslist's terms of service prohibiting advertising explicitly for sex work. Because the Adult Services and Erotic Services forums have long been shuttered and their URLs deleted, I was not able to sample ads posted to those forums.

*Dollar signs and dollar emojis.* Symbols and euphemisms were both used in order to signify sex work advertised on the Casual Encounters forums. Dollar signs, and later, dollar emojis were used frequently to announce sexual services with discretion. Although a lay reader might not notice a dollar sign in an ad or mistake it for a typo, a seasoned Craigslist user knows they are a flagship signature of sex workers.

As early as 2003 these symbols appeared in ad copy. A headline from a 23-year-old in New York City tacked a few dollar signs onto an otherwise unassuming post for a queer casual encounter: "Cute uncut white boyish-Anything Goes 4Tonight\$\$ - m4m - 23" (NYC). Other posters used dollar signs more explicitly, as with another New York City post titled "come get my \$\$\$," in which the poster was "seeking fs girl to display her

skills. i've got the \$\$\$ if you've got the time.” (NYC) In the parlance of sex work, “fs” stands for “full service” — code for a sex worker who will engage in penetrative intercourse. An ad in Chicago more than a decade later still used the dollar sign to signify sex work, but the \$ symbol had been replaced by dollar bill emojis, indicating the technological advances of the smartphone era. The Chicago poster used a number of linguistic codes when searching for a paying male client, including that he was “lookin for now only with older gentlemen” — “gentlemen” being a cue for johns. Farther down the ad he embedded four dollar sign emojis, and specified “\$\$\$\$spoilers only” (Chicago) alongside his name and phone number. The flagrance with which the Chicago ad propositioned paid sex may raise eyebrows among skilled Craigslist users. As I observed in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, law enforcement officials often use Craigslist to bust sex workers advertising organically on the site, but they also craft fake ads hoping to bust j johns. Ads like the Chicago post above might elicit suspicion from Casual Encounters users because it does not effectively hide the poster’s intentions to participate in sex work, nor does it mask the poster’s name or personal contact information. Skilled sex workers have learned to evade police by protecting their anonymity on Craigslist.

Johns likewise go to great lengths to hide their own identities and to codify their interest in sex workers. Johns use a number of terms to identify themselves on Casual Encounters forums. They use words like “generous” and “gentleman” when referring to themselves, and they also offer “donations” rather than payment. Some men looking for ongoing sexual relationships call themselves “Sugar Daddies” while others seek “mutually beneficial relationships.” Others still mask their search for sex workers by

asking for specific services to be performed, or by responding to ads made by individuals offering specific services. Sex work services may be called “massages,” or they may be labeled as bodywork, cleaning services, or different varieties of creative contract work.

*Generous and donations.* Men offered donations and women sought generous men in each of the cities sampled. The posters’ ages varied greatly, from those in their early 20s into their 50s. Men much more frequently sought sex workers than did women (there was one example in the sample of a woman hoping to compensate a man for sexual services), but women, transgender people, and queer men all advertised as sex workers with frequency. In New York City in 2003, a 25-year-old male advertised that he was “looking for a submissive female into bdsm - bondage” (NYC), and that he “(will spoil if requested).” Spoiling is yet another word to signify financial compensation for sex. Another New Yorker wrote for an even more unusual arrangement, in this ad for a dominant woman to “own” the poster’s sugar daddy. In the ad, titled “Dominant female wanted - m4w,” the poster wrote that “He wants a white female to boss him around. This is mutually beneficial for all of us. We get paid, he doesn't get laid!” (NYC) In this case, the sex worker would practice BDSM with the attorney for a fee, and the ad’s poster would operate as a middleman. Like a traditional pimp, the poster would expect to profit from the woman’s interaction with his source of income — the John or Daddy.

In Los Angeles in 2009, a woman wrote an ad describing herself as a “PETITE BLUE EYED RUSSIAN FEMALE FOR GENEROUS OLDER MAN w4m - 21” (LA). In this case “GENEROUS” referred to a man who will “spoil” a woman with gifts or financial incentives. “Generous” terminology continued to be used well into 2016, with



multiple ads in Chicago referencing men who are “gen.” One ad for a “Gen cocksucker looking for young latin cock” advertised that the poster “can be mod gen,” meaning that he would pay moderately for a Latino sex partner. Another Chicago poster called himself a “GENTleman” who “seeks young man.” The body of his post began by stating that “I’m a middle age white guy. I’m helpful.” In this context, helpful is the same as “generous,” meaning he would be willing to financially spoil his selected sex partner. Numerous posts throughout the sample used words like “generous,” “gentleman,” and “SD” or “Sugar Daddy” to indicate that pay-for-play was on the table.

*Massages and professional services.* Yet another tricky set of euphemisms in Casual Encounters discourse was that of the “masseuse” or “professional,” who may or may not offer sex alongside other therapeutic services. In New York City in 2003 one man offered “In Touch Bodywork by Asian guy - m4m” (NYC), but the body copy of the ad had been deleted by Craigslist administrators, suggesting that it offered sex work. In Chicago in 2016, massages were still being offered by men seeking men, but men had also started advertising their services to women. In one hopeful ad, a male masseuse provided a professional-looking “preferred services” form including options for extras including “vaginal massage,” “oral massage,” and “breast massage” in an ad titled “Trained Massage Therapist offering Massages for Women - m4w” (Chicago). Like other individuals offering sex work on Craigslist, this masseuse was careful not to charge directly for sexual services, noting instead that he accepts tips in lieu of payment. Explicitly charging for sex may also explain why certain ads for sex work were allowed to be archived on the Casual Encounters forum, while others, like that for “In Touch

Bodywork by Asian guy” in New York City were flagged and removed by Craigslist administrators. Because flagged ads were not been archived, there is no way to determine the contents of their body copy.

Although massages were frequently advertised as a cover for sex work, a handful of other ads in the sample offered financial reimbursement for other services that may have been euphemisms for sex work. One New York City woman sought a man who could help her get a good deal on a “honda civic 2004 loaded with spoiler,,,” (NYC). The poster wrote:

“Are you in business,,,are you a savvy negociator,own dealership, ,get me a new car,,just above dealer cost,,will award 100 dollars to best deal,..serious only phone and how u can help..or forget the 100..and lick me instead..:) (NYC)”

This nontraditional ad complicates the relationship between sex worker and client. In the first scenario, the poster offered \$100 to any man who could help her effectively negotiate the purchase of a 2004 Honda Civic. In the second scenario, the poster placed equivalent value on a man giving her oral sex in exchange for him helping with purchase negotiations. Although the boundaries of sex work are blurry, the ad exemplified an exchange of services (negotiation skills) for oral sex. Other questionable posts for sex work included an ad written by a 39-year-old married white looking for a Latina “cleaning woman.” The poster’s subtext suggested he sought more than a housecleaner: “I would prefer an actual maid/cleaning woman, who would be willing to provide the necessary services...” (Chicago) It was unclear what those “necessary services” might include.

*Drugs slang.* A final category of vernacular language has not yet been discussed. That is the language used to harness the overlap between sex forums and the digital drug trade. In New York City, Los Angeles, and Chicago, posts that mentioned “420” or marijuana were common. An ad written by a 32-year-old man was titled “Party girl?” and plainly stated: “Wanna do my last tabs of E and chill to some music?” Another ad was more covert, advertising for a woman interested in sharing his cocaine stash, though the ad’s coded language would be confounding to the untrained eye. That ad was posted as follows:

“lets chill with some vitamin c - m4w - 26

hey any ladies interested in some vitamin c and want to chill. i'm a cute guy just looking to have some fun, your pic gets mine and the vitamin c is on me” (NYC)

Ads written by Los Angeles residents in 2009 also used coded language to discuss cocaine, although their posts did not reference vitamins or supplements. For instance, one headline stated that the author was “looking for ski bunny - m4w,” (LA) an allusion to cocaine looking like snow. A second ad was slightly less implicit, with the author “Look for a horny freaky fast gogo partygirl who wants to meet up now - m4w - 35 - (Holly)” (LA). In Chicago, a woman advertised for a “Snow white Party - w4m” (Chicago)

Other posts about drugs in the sample either ambiguously mentioned getting high or being high, with one primary exception. The exception was an ad from Chicago that mentioned the popular gay party drug “poppers,” a VCR cleaner scientifically known as amyl nitrite, which relaxes the muscles in the anus and intensifies orgasm. Once again, an untrained eye might miss the reference, but in an ad titled “HOT GUYS ONLY 18-26”

(Chicago), the author stated toward the bottom of the ad's body copy that he was "Into most things mild to wild porn poppers rimming sucking ... lets Party and play!"

(Chicago). "Party and play" is code for drug use on top of sex. While it is no surprise that drug use is discussed on Craigslist, users take specific verbal precautions to limit prosecution by police and detection by other authorities and forum moderators.

**Sexual relationships sought.** It is important for Craigslist posters to build trust with each other and select for physical appearances and social acceptability because a proportion of Casual Encounters advertisements aspire to link their writers and readers IRL. Among other personals forums with titles like "Men Seeking Women," "Women Seeking Men," "Men Seeking Men," "Women Seeking Women," "Strictly Platonic," "Misc Romance," "Missed Connections," and "Rants and Raves," Casual Encounters stands out as the most gender- diverse, most sexuality-inclusive, and most sex-focused forum currently open on Craigslist. Men and women, straight and gay all post on Casual Encounters, whereas other forums focus on specific user demographics or on specific types of message board interests — ongoing romantic interests, shout-outs to cute strangers from the train or the grocery store, and rants and raves about online dating. So it is no surprise that many Casual Encounters' personal ads focus on casual sex. This section outlines themes in the types of sexual relationships sought within Casual Encounters, while also highlighting Craigslist Speak related to sex and dating preferences.

**Casual sex.** The majority of Casual Encounters ads are written by men looking for non-committed sexual interactions with women or other men. Casual sex is often

described in nonspecific terms, as is exemplified by this ad written by a 27-year-old man seeking a woman: “Looking for care free fun - Seeing if I can have any luck finding a woman who would like to meet up once or twice a month for some mutual fun that would be beneficial to us both” (Chicago). Take note that the 27-year-old poster sought “a woman” for “mutual fun.” No other details about the preferred encounter are provided. Similarly, a 38-year-old New York City man wrote: “I would like to meet a lady interested in a casual encounter with a handsome gentleman. ...” (NYC). Many ads seemed to intentionally use language that leaves each sexual encounter up to deliberation. Ambiguous words like “hook up,” “fool around,” and “play” were used frequently to express sexual interests (e.g., “I’m looking for a lady that wants hook up. I’m 24 ,white, 5’8”. I’m not that picky” (Chicago) or “Kinky Bi Male Horny and Looking for Play Tonight” (LA).) However, some ads did outline specific sex acts desired by the poster, such as penetrative vaginal sex, oral sex, or anal sex. Language tended to vacillate between vague and overt. Often ads were strategically non-specific but explicit, talking about preferred sex acts that could apply to any possible partner. Ads written by men seeking men tended to be more straightforward than those targeting female readers.

*No strings attached.* Many ads specified a timeline for the sexual relationship proposed. The term “no strings attached” (abbreviated “NSA”) peppered ads across the cities and time periods sampled. NSA relationships are those that do not necessitate an ongoing commitment or even a second meeting. In Craigslist Speak, NSA relationships are the most casual of all casual encounters. The NSA acronym was being used as early as 2003 in New York City ads, and was equally common in 2009 in Los Angeles and in

2016 in Chicago. Posts using NSA language usually sought ambiguous sex acts, such as these New York City ads:

“looking for late night NSA encounter—full pleasure gauranteed - m4w - 34 (manhattan)” (NYC)

“Me: 28, nicely fit, eager to expend some sexual energy with you and fawn over you for a while. NSA, responsible, drug and disease free.”

Others used terse language, like these ad headlines from Los Angeles: “hot fuck - nsa - fun - m4w - 33” (LA), and “I’ll suck you off, no strings and discreet. Bi/Married/Straight Guys - 31” (LA). And others still specified that an NSA relationship was preferred due to complications at home, such as an existing romantic partner or a living situation not amenable to casual sex, as with these two posts from Chicago: “I’d prefer you are attached truthfully because I am and would want NSA and no one getting clingy,” (Chicago) and “I would need this relationship to be with no strings attached, no drama, never at my home, and with no comittment....” (Chicago).

*Cheating.* Those final NSA comments from Craigslist posters in Chicago made it clear that Casual Encounters forums are sometimes used to arrange sex outside of marriages and other monogamous contexts. Men more often posted ads for non-consenting affairs, and often “straight” men sought sex with other men (discussed at length on page 174). However, some women also sought sex outside of their primary relationships, though no ads in this sample sought woman-on-woman encounters as a diversion from heterosexual relationships. Some ads for cheating were relatively innocuous, like this ad written by a 31-year-old man in New York:

“a very simple offer for a girl in her 20's, tonite  
meet me in a bar, make out with me, walk out with \$100. that's it. i'm  
goodlooking. but attached. want a little excitement...but not too much. you pick  
the place, and i'll meet you at 12:30 send pic.” (NYC)

But other ads for cheating spanned the spectrum of lascivious language. A post written by a 40-year-old married black man in Chicago expressed his interest in transgender women using specific, graphic syntax. His post made it clear that he was experimenting on Craigslist because sex had dwindled at home. In a post titled “Need This Dick Drained - m4t,” the poster sought oral and penetrative sex, writing that: “Wifey not taking care of my needs.”

Single Casual Encounters posters also occasionally fetishized interactions with married individuals. This was especially true for solo gay men who hoped to arrange casual encounters with straight men “involved” with women. This ad from Chicago demonstrates one man’s desire to do “whatever your wife, girlfriend, partner doesn’t do:”

“I just want to be your slave. Your mouth piece - m4mm  
What's up Boss. I'm looking to be whatever it is that your looking for. When your  
in need to nut. I want you to use me in whatever way possible. Whatever your  
wife, girlfriend, partner doesn't do. I will do. And shit whatever they do, do I will  
do better. ...” (Chicago)

However, some women also advertised for married men who they hoped to coax into sex acts outside their relationships. It appeared that cheating was a common goal for Craigslist posters of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations.

*Discretion.* Cheaters sometimes codified their cheating by using the word “discreet” to signal their relationships status to other Craigslist users. “Discreet” therefore is another iteration of Craigslist Speak. But posts that used the word “discreet” were not limited to cheaters. On Craigslist, discretion has multiple meanings, including “I’m cheating and need you to keep quiet;” “I’m straight and need you not to out me;” and “I know online sex ads are weird and I need you not to tell anyone we met on Craigslist.” In all cases, the need for a discreet encounter signaled that the sex orchestrated through Craigslist should not be spoken of with noninvolved parties. The preference for discretion signals to others that searching for sex on Craigslist automatically breaks societal codes for moral decency. Ads voiced the need for discretion as early as 2003 in New York:

“kinky & erotic guy looking for discreet encounter - m4w - 31 (anywhere)”

(NYC)

“Had a few drinks, and I’m in need of someone to hold and to have wild passionate sex with. nassau county location. discreet only, please.” (NYC)

“25 yo white male seeking a submissive female into bdsm - bondage for safe and discreet play” (NYC)

Although the above ads were written by men looking for female sex partners, ads posted in 2009 in Los Angeles and 2016 in Chicago made it clear that discretion was also expected among straight-presenting men seeking sex with other men. On Craigslist, gay men view straight-presenting partners as particularly enticing:

“gl white/hisp seeking DISCREET/ OLDER/MARRIED for regular - m4m - 24”

(LA)



“I’ll suck you off, no strings and discreet. Bi/Married/Straight Guys - 31” (LA)

Ads also sought discretion surrounding an even more diverse array of sex acts and sexual services. For instance, one man hoped to purchase pre-worn undergarments from women in the Chicago metro, noting that “You pick price and safe discreet way to exchange.” (Chicago) Another man asked for discretion in a sexual relationship he hoped to start with an older woman. This self-described “cute young white guy” advertised that he was “looking for his MILF this holiday season to have discreet fun with!” (Chicago), suggesting that age-discordant sex acts might be socially unacceptable.

Whether discretion was requested in order to mask sex sought outside of a primary relationship or outside the socially acceptable norms of posters’ real-life communities, its presence across time and geography suggests that people turn to Craigslist in order to escape the banality of their everyday realities. Casual Encounters forums offer a novel space to fantasize about sex acts that require discretion, and to potentially translate those fantasies into real-life sexual experiences. Like posts that attempt to build trust through establishing STI status, social acceptability, and physical attractiveness, asking for and offering discretion helps Craigslist users assure each other that they won’t be unduly outed for seeking sex on online message boards.

***Ongoing and friends with benefits.*** Although Casual Encounters forums necessarily attract individuals interested in casual sex, many personal ads seek more than a one-time hookup. Despite the forum’s name, some posters expressed interest in ongoing nonromantic sexual interactions and friends with benefits situations, while others advertised for dates, platonic friendships, and even romantic relationships. It is unclear

why these ads were posted to Casual Encounters and not other personal ads forums for M4W, W4M, M4M, W4W, or strictly platonic relationships. Such ads demonstrate that Casual Encounters exceeds its utility for strictly sexual purposes.

Some posters started by asking for a date. Personal ad copy suggested that a date might establish a potential sex partner's social acceptability outside of an online context. And because it is not entirely clear who you'll meet when you take an online interaction into physical space, these public meetings also provide opportunities for Craigslist users to verify their partner's identity before heading to an apartment or hotel for a late-night tryst. Wrote one 40-year-old New York City man in 2003: "How about some civilized downtown alfresco cool dining followed by adult fun?" (NYC) Although this ad openly acknowledged the poster's intention to engage in consensual sex, the "wine and dine" experience came first. Other posts from New York City in 2003 echoed the preference for a date before hopping into bed. Wrote one 32-year-old man seeking a woman:

"Normally I'd be headed to bed, but for some reason tonight I'm looking for one of those interesting late night New York City nights. If you're interested in throwing back a few drinks with some stimulating conversation until closing time, shoot me back an email ASAP..." (NYC)

Headlines sampled from Los Angeles six years later showed posters' continued interest in finding dates and ongoing relationships on the Casual Encounters forums. Some headlines were innocuous, such as these from L.A.: "Easy-going and needing a date - w4m - 25" (LA), "Looking for someone to make me laugh! Busty - w4m - 33," (LA) "Beach Body Hottie Seeks Fun Girl for Cuddling - m4w - 25," and "looking

for fun and lovable guy - 25” (LA). Alongside posters seeking dates and cuddles were those expressly seeking ongoing friendship along with sex, like these ads for a “mixed beauty seeing sexy playmate and friend - w4w - 28” and a young woman who wrote that “I want a dom kinky friend - w4m - 18.”

Advertisements in Chicago in 2016 also showed that posters used the Casual Encounters forums to arrange ongoing relationships. Wrote a man and woman looking for a white male third: “We are hoping to find a laid back and attractive WM for some ongoing fun.” (Chicago) They continued: “The ideal guy will be fit, 18-29, and local - someone that come to our place during lunch, after bars or hung over mornings.” The relationship sought was certainly sexual, but not necessarily casual. An ad from another man-woman couple also expressed interest in an ongoing relationship with a third for nights out on the town, plus someone to “just hangout with” in an ad titled “Couple Looking For A Female - mw4w” (Chicago).

Present-day Chicago posters seemed more amenable to exploring non-monogamous and polyamorous relationships than did forum users in New York City and Los Angeles in years prior.

*Friends with benefits.* Adhering to acronym-laden Craigslist speak, many posters signaled their interest in longer-term encounters by posting for “FWBs” or “friends with benefits.” FWBs are a specific type of sex partner — someone that might be interested in more than a sex-only “NSA” relationship, but someone who won’t challenge the relationship to move into romantic territory with high levels of emotional investment.

A 28-year-old New York City man posted to the forum “Seeking Latina or Asian female ‘Friend with benefits’” (NYC). His ad specified that he was an “unselfish lover looking for a lady to spoil with drinks and dinners, and enjoy safe, responsible NSA relief of mutual sexual frustration.” Ads from Los Angeles in 2009 echoed with similar headlines like: “FWB WANTED ~ - m4w - 31” (LA). So did ads from Chicago in 2016: “Attractive, Well Hung Male Seeking FWB - m4w (Elmhurst)” and “SEPARATED LOOKING FOR FWB - m4w” (Chicago). The former poster said he was “a fit, well hung, attractive, easy going guy who's looking for a woman to spend some of my free time with and have some no-strings attached fun...” while the latter expressed interest in taking the FWB relationship a bit further: “I'm looking for a woman that needs a nice guy in her life. A guy that will treat you like a queen. This could turn out to be more than just friends” (Chicago). Although news media portray Craigslist sex forums as spaces where illegal and amoral sex is orchestrated, Casual Encounters posters also clearly seek ongoing friendly and romantic arrangements. Ads demonstrated that select Craigslist users approach the Casual Encounters forum with the same optimism they might have toward mainstream dating sites, such as OkCupid or Match.com.

**Communities of sexual others.** Chapter 4 revealed that LGBTQ and feminist online magazines addressed Craigslist sex forums’ utility for LGBTQ people and other sexual minority groups. However, both alternative media and mainstream U.S. newspapers have underreported the importance of Casual Encounters forums for people with self-reported marginalized sexualities. Gay men and LGBTQ-curious people were overrepresented in Casual Encounters forums compared to the general population. Of the

298 posts, 73 (24.5%) were made by men seeking men and 27 (9%) were made by men seeking transgender partners or transgender people seeking men. However, only five posts (1.7%) were made by women seeking women. Non-monogamous people also made use of the Casual Encounters forums, with 26 (8.7%) of the ads seeking or advertising threesomes, group sex, or swinging encounters. Casual Encounters posters also explored their fantasies surrounding kink, fetish, and BDSM with relative frequency, as well as phone sex and cybersex. An unexpected but optimistic group of sexual outsiders also posted to the forums: sexually inexperienced men who hoped to find a woman to relieve them of their virginity. Finally, there were a number of posts that were so fantastic — so outlandish and graphic — that they can only be labelled “creepy.” Those excessively sexual posts are described in the final subhead in this section.

***LGBTQ culture.*** LGBTQ identities were commonly explored on the sampled Craigslist forums. LGBTQ subgroups on Casual Encounters included gay and bisexual men, and to an even greater extent straight-identified “curious” men. I also observed men interested in transgender women, and transgender women interested in men. There were relatively few lesbians and bisexual women posting in the forums, which reflects the general dearth of self-identified cisgender women who wrote ads in this sample.

***Gay men.*** This section describes Casual Encounters posts made by gay men and men seeking M4M encounters that did not self-identify as heterosexual. This is a crucial distinction to make, as many posts in the sample were written by men who called themselves straight but sought sex with other men.

Gay men often described their identities in terms of their sex roles. Slang terms like “masc” and “top” were used to describe posters who perform their sexuality in terms of hetero-masculinity. While “tops” orient around their preferred role in sexual encounters (as the partner who performs insertive anal intercourse), “masc” is used to describe an aesthetic that essentially “looks straight,” an especially desirable quality in communities of men who have sex with men (MSM). There were also posts made by men who identify as “vers” or “versatile,” meaning they are flexible in terms of the sex roles they assume (both performing and receiving insertive anal intercourse). A “vers” man might prefer to top or bottom, depending on his mood. For instance, one young man visiting Chicago wrote that he was a “Young Mixed Blk/wh Vers bottom / top male here” but only interested in a “hot body oral bottom for some hot discreet man to man action” (Chicago). While self-identified as “vers,” this poster hoped to “top” during the advertised encounter.

But it is not only “tops” and “vers tops” that use Craigslist to select for potential sex partners. On the contrary. The forums were also saturated with posts made by “bottoms” — men who prefer to be on the receptive end of oral and anal sex — seeking “tops” for casual sex and ongoing hookups. Although words like “bottom” and “top” were used often to cue readers to posters’ sexual preferences, other times their preferences for “giving” or “receiving” oral and anal sex used more creative forms of coded language. An ad from Chicago titled “I want to get gang banged by huge cocks all day in my high heels” used the word “sissy,” for instance, to indicate the poster’s

willingness to bottom for a group of men. The poster asserted: “Get your big cocked friends and make me the sissy...” (Chicago).

And one man from Chicago self-identified as a “twink,” an effeminate gay man with a youthful appearance. In an ad titled “24 twink for hookup,” the poster wrote that he was searching for a “hookup with athletic guy round my age ... I’m 6 ft 150 athletic toned body tight ass.” His mention of a “tight ass” indicated to readers that he was interested in bottoming. Mentioning the quality of one’s posterior is another common euphemism for bottoming, as with an ad from New York City titled “Gymnast hot bod, bubble ass - 11:30 now” (NYC). The body of the post said nothing more than “Send a pic. Looking for now,” and yet the poster’s description of himself as a “gymnast” with a “bubble ass” encodes his preferences for a partner who is willing to “top.”

While many ads expressed a preference for masculine-feminine pairings between mascs and twinks or tops and bottoms, there were also ads from masculine-identified men seeking partners with similar aesthetics. This “masc 4 masc” preference was obvious in one ad from a Los Angeles-area man described as a “tall white bro for similar top” (LA). While “bro” might indicate the poster’s athleticism and masculinity, masc MSM didn’t necessarily identify as or seek partners with Herculean aesthetics. For instance, one Chicago man posted that he was “In the mood for a hot hookup. Muscular, short guy here, 6.5” cut, looking for masculine guys who want to bottom” (Chicago). Plenty of similar ads were present across the sample. They used terminology such as “straight-looking” and “straight-acting” to validate their masculinity among Casual Encounters audiences. It seems that masculine men sought casual sex with other masculine men as a

sort of self-affirmation. “Masc 4 masc” ads can also be interpreted as a resistance against normative coupling patterns and expectations of gay partnership.

*Str8 and Down Low.* While self-identifying as “masc” indicates a certain internalized homophobia among MSM on Casual Encounters forums, there was a contingent of posters who took their preference for heterosexual masculinity to another level. Those gay men hoped to hook up with straight-*identified* men, a fetish referenced earlier in this chapter. As early as 2003, ads in New York City showed up from MSM seeking straight partners. Wrote one man: “st8/masc/bi hot inshape guys only pls thnxs/pic for pic thnxs” (NYC). An ad from Chicago was even more specific. The headline plainly stated: “Head for Straight guys... Get sucked off!” (Chicago). The white male poster continued by acknowledging that he was a “WM here is very into servicing Straight guys.... Private/ discreet .... NO return favors wanted,” meaning the act of performing oral sex on a straight man was all the poster desired. The subtext suggests that an authentically straight man would let a gay man give him oral sex, but that performing oral sex on another man would make him “not straight.” Other ads seemed to confirm that hypothesis. “Relax, it's only head!” emphasized another Chicago man who was “seeking a few straight guys who would like to stop by my place for head on occasion.”

Reflecting findings from previous research about Craigslist Casual Encounters forums (Reynolds, 2015; Ward, 2008), there was no dearth of MSM Craigslist users who identified as straight or who were closeted and married, partnered, or otherwise in relationships with women. Scholars have historically identified this as a racialized phenomenon called the Down Low (Chu, Peterman, Doll, Buehler, & Curran, 1992; Ford,



Whetten, Hall, Kaufman, & Thrasher, 2007). Men on the Down Low are straight-identified Black men who secretly have sex with men. Public health scholars argue they are at particularly high risk for contracting HIV through secretive MSM behaviors, and that they transmit HIV to unknowing female partners (Millett, Malebranche, Mason, & Spikes, 2005; Montgomery, Mokotoff, Gentry, & Blair, 2003; Stokes, McKirnan, Doll, & Burzette, 1996). Craigslist ads for Down Low sex don't necessarily use "DL" or "down low" to search for partners. Headlines might read something like: "Straight, looking to experiment...looking for same" (Los Angeles). And they don't always identify the poster's race or racial preference for partners. Although previous research has linked men of color to the Down Low phenomenon, this sample demonstrates that white men also participate in closeted homosexual behavior.

In New York City in 2003, posters used the terms "STR8" and "straight" to identify themselves and their preferred partners. One poster advertised for roommates on the Casual Encounters forum, writing that he had a "FREE ROOM IN HOUSE WITH POOL STR8MALES ONLY 18-25" (NYC). And an ad referenced earlier in this section identified another poster as "STR8 LOOKING" (NYC). On the other hand, some posters masqueraded as women, posting ads that might intrigue a "STR8" male reader. One ad for an anonymous oral encounter played up the allure of a hookup with a partner of an unknown gender. (The sheer statistical prevalence of men on Casual Encounters forums and the secretive tone of this post suggest that the poster was male-identified). The ad, titled "ANONYMOUS BLOWJOB 4 WELL ENDOWED GUY," stated:

“anonymous = you don't see me & i don't see you. part of the thirll is not knowing the gender of the person giving you head. you could guess that it's a guy but it could be girl one thing for sure, you'll get one of the best blowjobs you ever had” (NYC).

In Los Angeles in 2009, ads continued to use “STR8” as a code word (e.g. “any OLDER str8m looking for a bj/oral fun?”), but they also included men who self-identified as married or attached. And in a more sinister approach to homoeroticism, one young man hoped to bond with another man by sharing photographs of their girlfriends. His headline stated matter-of-factly: “do you have a gf ? lets talk about our girlfriend 's. i have reg pics.” Because the Internet Archive did not provide access to body copy in the advertisement posted from Los Angeles, there is no telling what appeared alongside each of the above headlines.

However, ads seven years later in Chicago suggested that STR8 MSM developed an especially explicit discourse used to organize covert affairs. In an ad titled “masc hung stud for hungry man now not later,” a poster wrote that he was a masculine man seeking a “masc man who likes swallowing big ones a man who also has or likes woman in their life is a big ++++ 420+++ days only” (Chicago). His inclusion that he could meet during “days only” suggest this poster planned MSM encounters around his evening schedule with the woman in his life. A similar post by a 36-year-old man also emphasized discretion. The ad, titled “Big Burly SUB Seeks Similar to Make me A feel Piggy!” established “I am married and prefer you be married as well.” (Chicago).

Posts made by SR8 and DL men raised questions about the relationship between sexual identity and sexual behavior. They also raised questions about the relationship between sexuality and racial identity. The Casual Encounters forums appeared to be more useful for STR8 and DL men and others who were “testing the waters” sexually than for individuals whose sexualities would be uncontested and accepted by culture at large. Many posts made by STR8 and DL men drew attention to social stigma against bisexuality and homosexuality. In an ad titled “Visiting,” one man wrote: “I am not out and very discrete.” He wrote that he was “Looking for another guy in similar situation who might be interested in getting together and have a drink and conversation.” He followed up: “I tend to be on the quiet side... Not much experience, so would have to go slow...” (Chicago). Craigslist ads give closeted men an easy in with members of the LGBTQ community, who they would not meet in their daily activities.

*Trans-identified.* Compared with the dozens of ads posted by gay, bisexual, and bi-curious men, there were relatively few Casual Encounters posts in the sample made by transmen and transwomen. Of transgender people who posted to the forums, only one identified as a transman. The majority of ads from trans people came from Los Angeles and were made by transwomen seeking cisgender male partners. On the flipside, numerous posts were made by cisgender men seeking transwomen for casual sex.

Like gay and curious men, transwomen seemed to place some capital on arranging dates and sex with straight-identified men. It struck me as a bit counter-productive that a transwoman would assume that most men interested in transwomen would not identify as straight; a recent study from Northwestern University in Chicago

found that men who are attracted to transwomen are also generally attracted to cisgender women — and not often to cisgendered men (Rosenthal, Hsu, & Bailey, 2016). And yet posts seeking straight-identified partners proliferated. A post from New York City in 2003 was written by a 29-year-old “VGL Shemale looking for masculine straight male” (NYC). In the body copy of the ad, and in response to media stereotypes of transwomen on Craigslist, she emphasized with capital lettering that “I am NOT a working girl ! !” Although she was the only trans person to post in the sample of New York City ads, there were numerous ads for transwomen posted in Los Angeles. The full selection of ad headlines written by transwomen in Los Angeles is as follows:

“Need UNCUT dick to suck tonight!!!!!! - t4m - 26 - (Koreatown) pic”

“Sexy, tight and young - t4m - 21 - (WEHO) pic”

“Looking 4 Hung Young Guys 4 Fun - t4m - (Los Angeles) pic”

“WAITING FOR HUNG GUY NOW - t4m - 25 - (HOLLYWOOD) pic”

“LATINA CD.. LOOKNG 4 FUN !!! - t4m - 22 - (323) pic”

“CD seeking a nice gentlemen prefer an older men needs am D\*ic - t4m - 32  
- (Hawtorne) pic”

“SEXY PASSABLE CD - t4m - 19 - (LA) pic”

There are some consistencies among the posts on the Los Angeles forum on that day in winter 2009. All but the “CD seeking a nice gentleman” ad had a similar number of words; used language like “young,” “hung,” and “fun;” were posted by transwomen in their late teens to mid-20s; and were located in either Los Angeles proper or areas just outside downtown. It is feasible that the seven ads posted by trans women in Los Angeles

were actually posted by only two individuals. Craigslist moderators now scan for consistency among posts — as many news stories in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 discussed — a practice that flags multiple posts for the same services by the same user within a 48 hour period (Craigslist, 2017c). Surveilling consistency among multiple Craigslist posts within a short time period is one way that police operations and administrators and moderators track sex workers and cybercriminals.

Although many posts were written by transwomen seeking men, only one post was written by a transman. That post came from a 21-year-old Black transgender male in Chicago. He sought a cis-man for mutual masturbation in a friends with benefits relationship. He wrote that he was “Looking for someone that's laid back and chill and will respect my transition. I still have all my original parts so please be aware of that” (Chicago). This was by far the most “queer-friendly” post in the sample, in that the poster was upfront about his stage in his transition (pre-op on testosterone), was candid about the type of sex he was looking for (mutual masturbation), and was open to partners of diverse physical characteristics (penis size was explicitly not a concern). In contrast, posts made by transwomen upheld normative binaries of cis-gender heterosexual relationships.

*Cisgender seeking transgender partners.* Although transwomen eroticized sleeping with “straight” men who fit conventional sex roles associated with heterosexual masculinity, many cismen who hoped to sleep with transwomen appeared to harbor contradicting fantasies. Those men idealized being a “bottom” for a transwoman. They hoped to be “topped,” in turn tapping into their submissive inclinations. While no cis-

men in the New York City posts sought a trans-female partner, this headline from Los Angeles made the poster's desire obvious: "Want to bottom for a hot ts - m4t - 24" (LA). Using language more common to the LGBTQ scene than to cis-het men on Craigslist, one man from Chicago identified himself as a "power bottom jock," seeking a transwoman to top him. "If you're a top girl that likes pounding jocks, hit me up. I'm 6'2" and athletic" (Chicago). Additional ads from Chicago used similar rhetoric.

Ads seeking transwomen also diverged from the heteromasculine dynamic transwomen seemed to idealize. An ad for "Pantyhose Fun?" posted by a 26-year-old man in Chicago outlined his own experimentation with gender identity, pointing out that "I'm definitely not passable or even try to be for that matter..." The full ad articulated the author's interest in pushing limits of normative gender and sexual expression. "I do enjoy slipping into some pantyhose and would love to find someone else that does." (Chicago). Other ads emphasized that only "PASSABLE" girls were acceptable, and that being "FEMININE A MUST." On the bright side, there were two posts in Chicago made by a cis-man who genuinely seemed interested in sparking a relationship with a transwoman. In one ad titled "Looking to make a friend, possibly more. - m4t (North Riverside)" the poster wrote: "I'm looking to make a friend who laidback and funny. Eventually... I'd like for us to do things together.." (Chicago). A similar ad read: "Looking for my TS Princess - m4t" and continued that "I am looking for something long term that can lead to a solid relationship" (Chicago). It appeared that most of the ads seeking transwomen were somehow either "too queer" because they were not posted by "passable" women, or

overtly fetishizing of transwomen's bodies. But as with other Casual Encounters ad categories, there was a smattering of more sincere personal ads for ongoing relationships.

*Lesbians.* Compared with gay and Down Low men and transgender women, lesbians did not frequently post ads to cities on dates in this sample. It seemed that young women instead used Craigslist to experiment with their sexuality. One young woman posted that she was “nervous but excited and curious - w4w - 18” (LA). Another Los Angeles woman wrote that she was a “mixed beauty seeing sexy playmate and friend - w4w - 28” (LA), but her headline sidestepped using any verbiage that would associate lesbian sex with a lesbian relationship. It could be that the previous ad was written by a woman “on the Down Low” — a straight-identified woman seeking a female sex partner that wouldn't compromise her identity in public. I have observed this phenomenon in other research on W4W Craigslist ads (Reynolds, 2014). Perplexingly, no ads for lesbian encounters were posted on Chicago's Casual Encounters forum on the sampled date in December 2016.

*Bisexuality and threesomes.* Among the posters who sought lesbian, gay, and transgender partners were bisexual people hoping to explore with either one or more people of any gender. Like others in the LGBTQ community, bisexual folks used Craigslist to access sex partners they might not easily link with in their real-life social groups. Ads fit into two categories: Those made by couples and those made by individuals. Ads by individuals were written by men and women of diverse age groups. There was an in New York City titled “let me pleasure you both” (NYC), in which a 34-year-old “cute red head” woman advertised offering to give oral sex to a man-woman

couple. In Los Angeles in 2009, numerous ads written by single men appeared in search of heterosexual couples for hookups. “Kinky Bi Male Horny and Looking for Play Tonight - m4mw” (LA) one headline stated. Another ad echoed: “Swing time with a kinky bi guy - Couples, Woman, Bi Guys - m4mw” (LA). In Chicago in 2016, one man wrote that he was a “vas safe bi white male looking to have a fun time with a couple,” including performing oral sex on the couple, penetrating the woman, or receiving anal sex from the man. Clearing up what the poster meant by “vas,” he elaborated: “I’m very clean dd free hiv- and have had a vasectomy ... Very open-minded and will try anything...” (Chicago).

On the other hand, many couples also seemed willing to try anything provided they could identify the appropriate bisexual suitor. In online dating parlance, these ads were hoping to attract the attention of a “unicorn” — a truly 50/50 bisexual person who both members of the couple were attracted to. A New York City couple in their late-40s sought a “very oral minded bi female (NYC)” In Los Angeles, a couple in their early 20s advertised that they were a “Hot energetic young couple seeking 3rd” (LA). And in Chicago many couples of diverse age ranges sought men and women to join them for one-time or ongoing sexual experiences. One Latino couple stated that they were “looking for a big. Clean. White or Latino dick to unload” (Chicago). Like other posts for different types of relationships, ads for threesomes attempted to verify the legitimacy of people who responded. Much like gay men, bicurious men and women, and transgender people, bisexual people turned to Casual Encounters forums in order to explore and experiment with their sexualities.



***Fantasy and exploration.*** There were, however, many fantasies explicated on Craigslist forums that had nothing to do with sexual orientation or gender identity. Although any and all ads posted to Casual Encounters forums might be considered fantasies because they are being sent to no one in particular, the below categories represented complex and specific desires limited to niche communities even smaller than those defined by gender or sexual orientation. These sexual Others included members of fetish and kink communities, swingers and polyamorous people, folks particularly interested in phone sex or online chat, people hoping to lose their virginity, and a category of men I will for now call “creeps.” I will explain the latter in more detail toward the end of this section.

***Fetish and kink.*** I use fetish and kink as the blanket term for any sexual practices that prioritize acts of bondage, domination, sadism, or masochism (BDSM); object fetishes (e.g. shoes or leather); voyeurism and exhibitionism; age play; body size fetishes; and other less-common sexual practices that are advertised on Casual Encounters forums. Although Craigslist seems to serve many members of fetish and kink communities, this aspect of Craigslist forums was not an area covered prominently by mainstream or alternative news outlets in Chapter 3 or Chapter 4. As with the aforementioned groups of sexual Others, fetish and kink communities turn to the Casual Encounters forums in order to locate and communicate with people who have likeminded sexual interests that might be considered outside the mainstream.

Many ads in the sample sought either dominant or submissive partners for particular types of power play. Some of them have been outlined in previous sections,

such as ads made by gay men looking explicitly to “bottom” in a submissive sex role. Other ads from New York City in 2003 made it clear that BDSM is an important part of many peoples’ sex lives. Young people and old both sought BDSM relationships. One man wrote that he was a “25 male looking for submissive female into bdsm -bondage - m4w - 25” (NYC), while another headline curtly stated: “Dominant female wanted - m4w” (NYC). Gay men too posted for BDSM sex. A headline posted by a gay white man sought two black men who would be interested in spanking him: “GWm seeking two GBM tops for spanking, and screwing - m4m - 36” (NYC). Others still posted hoping to find partners for other BDSM acts, like urine play (e.g. “SHOWER FOR PUNISHMENT - 33” (NYC)). Similar sentiments appeared in post from Los Angeles in 2009. They simply stated, “I want a dom kinky friend - w4m - 18” (LA), and asked “Are you a submissive slut that needs to be trained? - m4w” (LA). And in Chicago in 2016, BDSM activities maintained their prominence among sex acts sought on Casual Encounters. Wrote one gay man: “I just want to be your slave. Your mouth piece - m4mm (Chicago).” And a Down Low submissive man wrote: “Big Burly SUB Seeks Similar to Make me A feel Piggy!” (Chicago).

Although many posters wanted to explore dominance and submission, others wrote ads addressing less popular kinks. Numerous ads appeared touting the writer’s interests in specific object and body part fetishes; voyeurism and exhibitionism; age play; body size fetishes; and other niche sexual interests. For instance, a man from Chicago wrote an ad titled “Stockings/Nylons Phone Sex” (Chicago), in which he hoped to find another man who wanted to mutually fantasize about women’s stockings. A 29-year-old

man from Los Angeles sought a woman for drug use and a footwear fetish: “420 and gotta like shoes... - m4w - 29” (LA). Exhibitionists and voyeurs also popped up on occasion, like this Brooklyn man: “Hey, I’m bi, in great shape, good lookin exhibitionist available to play anything from me stripping and performing for you to us seriously getting it on if there’s chemistry,” (NYC). Others wanted a mutual show, as with one Los Angeles man “lookin for mutual webcam masturbation... - m4w - 26” (LA). In Chicago, one couple posted hoping to find a woman to “Just Watch Or Give Us Some Instruction - mw4w” (Chicago). But not all ads were so mutually consenting. A Chicago man posted an ad in search of another man to masturbate with over Apple’s FaceTime video chat app. “Would love to share pictures, stories or even panties of each other’s wives as we jerk off together,” he wrote, but did not indicate that his wife had agreed to exhibition of her images or distribution of her clothing items. It is of note that no single women posted ads seeking or offering voyeuristic or exhibitionistic fantasy play.

Numerous men and women also hoped to engage in age play, seeking substantially older or younger partners. Ads from Chicago and Los Angeles hoped to link their writers with older women, such as an ad from a young man “Looking for a MILF! - m4w” (Chicago) and another seeking a “Cougar ~ ~ - m4w - 31” (LA). Older men sometimes sought “sons,” blurring the line between age play and incest fantasy. A 50-year-old married white man from outside Chicago wrote that he was a “Dad looking for son” (Chicago). Young women also looked for older men, and older men certainly posted hoping to attract younger women.

Body size fantasies were the next-most common fetish observed in this sample. Using coded language, many men advertised their interest in “BBW” — big, beautiful women. Blending two kinks (age play and body size fetish), one ad from Chicago was from a “Younger Male for BBW - m4w” (Chicago). A post from New York City similarly mixed size preference and racial preference, with a 29-year-old man of undisclosed ethnicity posting that “I need a black BBW cunt on my face tonite- any age - m4w - 29” (NYC). In an age-based role reversal, one Chicago woman wrote that she was a “BBW looking 4 younger guy for fwb - w4m” (Chicago). Fetishes and fantasies overlapped on Craigslist, allowing posters to articulate intersecting components of their sexual identities.

*Group sex.* Many people in the sample also sought group sex encounters, which were distinct from other fetishes and paraphilias, and which also expanded beyond the gender-based interests of LGBTQ people. Some individuals looking for group sex did identify as bisexual, as with one Los Angeles man advertising for “Swing time with a kinky bi guy - Couples, Woman, Bi Guys - m4mw” (LA), or as with a Chicago man throwing a sex party and “Calling all kinky bisexual people - m4mw” (Chicago). Some couples sought “swap” situations in which a man-woman pair trades partners and has sex in the same room, like one Los Angeles ad that simply inquired: “Swap partners? - mw4mw - 40” (LA). Others sought company in group sex such as an “Attractive, Tall, Built SWM seeking F for Swing Club - m4w - 26” (NYC). Gay men, too, advertised their interest in group sex, excluding female partners altogether. However, rather than seeking “swaps” or “parties,” they tended to ask for gang bangs. This linguistic specificity

indicates that the poster wants to be at the center of penetrative attention. Whereas a “swap” or a “party” suggests at least the presumption of mutual sexual activity among all parties, a gang bang suggests that one person receives sexual attention while the other individuals perform it. It is more similar to sexual power-exchange than sexual equitability. Wrote a New York City man in 2003: “i wanna be gangbanged by as many young lean dudes as will take me tonight (NYC)” (NYC). Straight men also attempted to find women for gangbangs. One ad, posted in all caps, read: “GANG BANG THIS SATURDAY IN THE VALLEY - m4w” (LA). However unlikely it is that a woman on the Casual Encounters forum would see, read, and respond to this ad, the author was clearly optimistic — as are most ads seeking sex partners on Craigslist.

*Phone and chat.* Perhaps in an attempt to explore sexual fantasies, kinks, and fetishes without compromising their safety or identities, some posters also sought phone- and internet-mediated interactions that were not designed to extend into IRL contexts. Advertisements for phone sex and cybersex seemed to be more frequent in New York City in 2003 than in Los Angeles or Chicago years later, but each city included at least a few posts in this category.

Certainly posts for phone and chat sessions were a sign of the times. In New York City in 2003 ads frequently referenced AOL Instant Messenger and Yahoo Messenger. A post written by a 27-year-old man “looking for F to have a naughty CHAT online with ME!!” (NYC) included the author’s personal screen names. Another New York City ad posted by a 30-year-old man “SEEKING A WOMAN THAT LOVES MAKING OUT & WOULD LIKE TO CHAT ONLINE” (NYC) also included his AOL Instant Messenger

ID. Other men and even one woman posted advertising for “phone fun.” The 27-year-old woman headlined her ad: “Any older men for phone fun? - w4m” (NYC), while a man of undisclosed age lamented the weather. “Any ladies up for some phone fun? I'm bored and sick of the rain” (NYC), he wrote.

In Los Angeles in 2009, headlines indicated that phone sex was the mediator of choice. One man emphasized the privacy factor afforded by chatting, asking his readers: “Love hot phone? Let's have fun. Just you and me... private.. - m4w - 29” (LA). And echoing earlier ads that were ambiguously consensual, a 23-year-old man asked other male readers to chat and share pictures of their girlfriends. “do you have a gf ? lets talk about our girlfriend 's. i have reg pics” the author stated. It was unclear whether the poster hoped to chat over the phone, on a messaging application, or via e-mail.

In Chicago in 2016, there were two posts advertising for chatting or phone sex. Both focused on sharing pictures of the authors’ female partners. One author wrote that he was a: “Married male looking for another married male interested in mutual masterbation either in person or via FaceTime. ... Interested in regular everyday women..not models with fake this or fake that. Natural wives..flaws and all.” (Chicago). The other post asked to chat about nylon stockings and share images of female partners in nylons. One again, Craigslist posters sidestepped their female partners’ consent in order to engage with a particular communication-based fantasy.

*Virgins.* Evidencing the problem-solving power of Internet sex forums, another group of posters hoped to address a common sexual concern of late adolescence and young adulthood. Male posters in New York City and Los Angeles sought partners that

would be willing to take their virginity. Such fantasies were less developed than those expressed by individuals seeking partners who would engage in particular fetishes, group sex, or phone sex. A 24-year-old New York City man wrote a somewhat pitiful plea, announcing that being bullied by his friends had driven him to Craigslist to find his first sex partner:

“24 yr old virgin wants a girl to rock his world - m4w - 24

i am a 24 yr. old virgin that was planning on waiting til he got married but has decided the hell with that. all my friends always make fun of me. i would like an experienced girl/woman to knock my socks off and thats also patient since its my first time. ....” (NYC).

Headlines from Los Angeles included sexually inexperienced men looking for “a hot BBW” (LA) and a couple with which to explore sexually. In all cases, advertisements for virgins were written by men. They seemed to reflect a common sentiment expressed by this young man in Los Angeles: “VIRGIN NEEDS HELP - m4w - 20” (LA).

*Creeps.* Of course, no discussion of Craigslist’s clientele would be complete without addressing the most taboo scribes of online personal ads. These individuals, who I will label “creeps” sidestepped cultural mores surrounding sex and decency, delving into fantasies that would make even brave Craigslist readers squirm. These advertisers included men interested in scat play or oral sex during a woman’s period, and those who expounded their deepest erotic fantasies without any discretion or concern for their readers. It is possible that these posters were not seeking sex partners for IRL interactions, or even for phone sex or instant message chatting. Rather, they might have

used Craigslist as a tool for a sort of uninvited exhibitionism, laying out their darkest fantasies for any reader with the patience (or gumption) to finish their ads.

### **The Ideology of Online Sexuality**

This chapter has made it clear that Craigslist hosts a number of subcultures that converge on the Casual Encounters forums in order to express their fantasies, seek sex partners, and sometimes form meaningful relationships. Like all cultures, the Casual Encounters forums have developed an ideology that represents users' belief systems and politics. Before discussing that ideology, however, it is important to reflect on what we have gleaned so far about the people who use Casual Encounters: They are mostly male, they are disproportionately LGBTQ, they span an age range between young and middle aged, and for myriad reasons they have been stigmatized by mainstream culture as sexual Others. They also have specific psychographic profiles that make them more likely to seek sex and relationships in online contexts — sometimes because their sexual preferences are particular to communities reading Craigslist personal ads (as with gay men and transwomen, for instance), and other times because they relish a certain Internet-mediated exhibitionism that may or may not be directed toward the search for an actual IRL sex partner. These individuals' characteristics are reflected en masse in the ideology of Casual Encounters forums, which are densely populated with racist, sexist, masculinist logics that likely contributed to media coverage of the forums at large.

**Racialized desire.** Many of the posts previously discussed in this chapter adhered to a certain system of racialized sexual preferences, as with ads headlined “I need a black BBW cunt on my face tonite- any age - m4w - 29” (NYC) or with body copy that



asserts the poster “Want(s) to buy panties from latina girl in Waukegan, Gurnee area” (Chicago). Race-based ads were common throughout the cities and time periods sampled. This in itself is not surprising; research shows that online daters prefer to enter homogamous relationships — relationships with partners who share their own social and cultural backgrounds (Rudder, 2014). According to Rudder, it is common for Black women to seek Black male partners on OkCupid for instance, or for Asian men to select for Asian women on Match.com.

However, none of the Craigslist ads sampled demonstrated preferences for homogamy. At least not explicitly. There were a few posts in which the poster did not specify their racial or ethnic background but expressed preferences for partners of particular races, as with one New Yorker who posted a headline seeking “Any GAM or BI AM for some late night - m4m.” GAM means gay Asian male and BI AM means bisexual Asian male. There was no indication of the author’s own background in the body copy, which said nothing more than: “fun? looking to kiss and feel one another.” Another ad placed by a Chicago couple was similar. While their headline was relatively innocuous (“Searching for a new third to orally pamper - mw4m”), their body copy was more revealing. “We are hoping to find a laid back and attractive WM for some ongoing fun. We are both attractive, good jobs, strong minds but also an obsession with orally pleasing a ‘stud’ type” (Chicago). While they clearly preferred a white male for a threesome, there was no indication whether the posters were white, Black, Asian, or Latino. Perhaps by indicating that they have “good jobs” and “strong minds” they hoped

to codify their whiteness for potential readers, and their interest in white male partners could be interpreted as covert white supremacy.

On the other hand, heterogamy was observed frequently among posters on the Casual Encounters forums. Posters that mentioned race in their ads tended to seek partners with different skin colors than their own. This was true of straight and gay posters, and of posters representing many different racial groups. In New York City, headlines included those seeking “Asian Women Looking for Beautiful Mahogany Man to Play With - m4w” (NYC) and, more explicitly, that a “hung swm wants to fuck black pussy - m4w - 26” (NYC). “Mahogany” identifies the former poster as a Black man, while “swm” indicates the latter poster is a single white man. In Los Angeles, headlines sounded similar, although without access to the ads’ body copy, it is difficult to ascertain the race of the writers. One gay man wrote: “If you Persian or Armenian-Hosting, NOW!!! - m4m” (LA) Another sought anonymous sex, stating that he had a “glory hole open for big black cocks - m4m” (LA). (A glory hole is a constructed wall or barricade with a hole in it, through which the recipient of oral sex inserts his penis for the performer of oral sex to access anonymously). In Chicago, a white man sought young straight-acting Latino men for sex work, posting that a “GENTleman.seeks young latino top thug thug - m4m” (Chicago). And another white man posted that he was a “White male looking for a latina cleaning woman to stop by and ‘clean’ a few times a week” (Chicago). But heterogamous racial preferences were not limited to white men seeking partners of color. A “Blk vgl masc dl” man posted a headline “Looking 4 big white dick” (Chicago). And a young, gay Black man posted that he was a “Black Cherry Bottom for

White Creamy Top! - m4m” (Chicago). It seems that on Craigslist, posters transcend and reject traditional relationships norms such as homogamous partner preferences. In doing so, they play into race-based fetishes and passé stereotypes.

**Masculinity.** Reflecting the gender demographics of the Casual Counters is a culture of exhibitionistic masculinity. While my previous research on Casual Encounters forums has found that MSM Craigslist posts are rife with “heterosexual masculinity— a social-sexual identity characterized by homophobia, ‘success and status, toughness and independence, aggressiveness and dominance,’ and by an absence of femininity and homosexuality (Herek, 1986, p. 568; Reynolds, 2015), this sample demonstrated that a culture of masculinity dominated the forums without necessarily adhering to homophobia. Men asserted their masculinities in forum posts by describing their “masculine” professions, qualifying their education, discussing their penises, and objectifying women. The Casual Encounters forums appear to function as a sort of digital locker room, where overt masculinity can be celebrated without being policed.

***Educated and employed.*** Men on the Casual Encounters forums emphasized that they were either educated or employed in order to vet themselves for potential sex partners. This is consistent with previous research I conducted about “straight” MSM on Casual Encounters forums (Reynolds, 2015). Men articulated their level of education in order to make themselves seem like they have more “life experience” in some cases, as with this New York City man who boasted that he sought a woman who likes “A man of taste and distinction. I am well educated, have traveled the world extensively, single, mid 30’s, stay in very good shape” (NYC). Other men seemed to arbitrarily include that they

are educated, perhaps in order to persuade potential suitors that they are not a creep or Internet troll. In Chicago, one man linked his masculinity with his education in a post for another man or couple: “masculine horny educated guy here needs a hosting guy or couples to hang with for ongoing regular friends with bens” (Chicago). On the other hand, one young man seemed to use his education to vouch for his age. He wrote: “I am a 23 years old guy, just graduated and wants to have some fun. I am well educated and funny” (NYC).

Other men relied on their professional backgrounds in order to authenticate their masculinity. Some used the word “professional” without specifying their particular career choices, as with this 33-year-old man in New York City: “...I'll just keep this short and say that if you are a fun, adventurous women who is seriously up for meeting a young, professional, good looking guy later tonight for some casual, nsa, safe-sex — then just send me a quick note and we can take it from there...” (NYC). Some posters were more forward about their identities, as with one “Single, older physician, D/D free, creative, uninhibited up for anything that is legal, consensual and won't kill us...” (NYC). Although those men and others in New York City emphasized their white collar professionalism, men in Chicago described their blue collar jobs in traditionally masculine fields. One man's entire post for oral sex revolved around his career as a truck driver:

“pilot truck stop - m4m

34 year old white male truck driver 6 foot 200 pound average build 7.5 cut cock I need someone to come suck my cock asap” (Chicago).

Another Chicagoan described himself as gay but mentioned his auto-mechanic job to seduce potential sex partners. In his ad, titled “Professional gay auto body repair,” the author outlined a sort of barter:

“I am a 43 year old gay auto body repair guy for over 20 years & I am willing to repair any type of damage on your vehicle. Just be straight looking & acting & have a 7 or 8inc uncut cock for me to suck on from time to time”

Men seemed to reference their professionalism or blue collar status to indicate to potential partners that they were either reliable, masculine, or both. No Los Angeles headlines mentioned their authors’ professional statuses, likely because that information was embedded in the body content of their posts, which was not available for this research.

***Penis size.*** A final variety of navel-gazing was rampant among male posters on the Casual Encounters forums. Men from each city emphasized the size of their penises over and over again as a signal of their masculinity. Although research has shown that women and men prefer penises of diverse sizes (Lever, Frederick, & Peplau, 2006) and that factors beyond penis size, such as frequency of intercourse and satisfaction with relationships have impacts on sexual satisfaction (Weiss & Brody, 2011), it appeared that men advertising on Craigslist had not gotten that memo.

***Resisting toxic masculinity.*** Casual Encounters’ culture of masculinity is not lost on all of the people who peruse the forums. One ad in the sample stood out as being particularly resistant to the forums’ expectations for masculine men. In this post, the

writer both lamented and poked fun at his lack of similarity to other men seeking sex on the forum:

“I'm a loser - m4w

well apparently. I mean it's almost 1am and I'm posting on the CL casuals section.

I'm single, I'm kinky, I don't have a ton of cash. I'm not in shape enough to be an

in shape guy , I'm not young enough to be a young guy (I'm in my early thirties)

I'm skinny but I have a little bit of a belly. I don't want to travel, I don't want to

club, I don't want to pay for sex and I don't have (or want to have) any drugs to

give anyone. I don't live in Manhattan. I don't want to have sex with anyone who

can't carry on a conversation. I don't have a hot girlfriend to bring with me to join

a w4mw. I'm not gay or bi so I'm not really available for most of the action here.

I'm not hung like a horse. Oh, I do know how to go down on a gal like a

superbeing though” (NYC).

At the very least, this ad demonstrates good humor in an online environment that rewards stereotypical markers and socially acceptable forms of gender and sexuality. It also makes salient those themes called out as benchmarks of Casual Encounters culture, demonstrating that a man’s marketability on Craigslist depends on culturally relevant status symbols, such as being “hung like a horse” and having drugs or money.

## **Conclusions**

Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 demonstrated that national newspapers and LGBTQ and feminist online magazines emphasized Craigslist’s utility for the sex trade, but they additionally emphasized the cultural relevance of Craigslist for LGBTQ people. This

chapter confirms that LGBTQ people — especially gay, bisexual, and bi-curious men — disproportionately use the forums to arrange casual sex. While LGBTQ culture is prominent on Craigslist, there is also a strong sense of internalized homophobia present among posts made by men seeking men. And while sex work was observed in a handful of posts of the 298 analyzed in this sample, sex workers were not among the majority of active Casual Encounters users. Rather, this chapter illustrates the rather pedestrian reality of Craigslist sex forums: That they are populated by mostly straight, mostly young-to-middle aged white men who are exploring their sexual fantasies among an audience of mostly straight, mostly young-to-middle aged white men. If there is a metaphor to describe activity observed in New York City, Los Angeles, and Chicago Casual Encounters forums between 2003 and 2016, it is that Craigslist operates as a digital Adult Superstore where boys can be boys without women's surveillance or the intervention of those who police political correctness. Casual Encounters forums foster a culture of unrestrained sexual expression that reflects posters' unbridled fantasies — however problematic those may appear to Craigslist outsiders, journalists included.

Causal Encounters forums importantly provide an outlet for people mainstream culture may perceive as sexual outsiders — such as kink and poly communities, fetishists, gender-non-binary people, and non-identifying LGBTQ people. These communities converge in Casual Encounters forums because Craigslist allows for unbridled sexual expression. On Craigslist, mainstream perceptions of sexual deviance are replaced with the quotidian desires of sexual outgroups. Sexual preferences that might be considered abhorrent among family members, friends, and colleagues are

commonplace on Craigslist. Craigslist also provides a shield of anonymity that allows posters to explore their sexualities without fear of identification or being “outed” — an important contrast to more mainstream dating websites and hookup applications such as OkCupid, Match.com, Tinder, and Grindr, which rely on personal bios and photos to authenticate users’ identities. On Craigslist, people can explore their deepest desires in a disembodied context. They need not rely on their offline personas or divulge anything about their day-to-day goings-on. Casual Encounters users can theoretically be whoever they want to be and explore their sexualities however they would like. The act of seeking sex on Craigslist is itself a type of fantasy, given that posters and readers engage in a form of voyeurism and exhibitionism. To post your most intimate longings to a virtual audience of strangers provides its own thrill, whether or not an online ad results in an IRL relationship, or whether or not ads were written with the goal of IRL interactions in the first place.

Most importantly, Casual Encounters forums foster their own unique cultures, which are complete with language and ideology specific to their users. Although mass media report on Craigslist as a hotbed for sexual deviance, they miss a crucial element of the story: That Craigslist forums provide a sense of community for groups of people who may otherwise be ostracized for their sexualities. The milieu of diverse individuals seeking sex online produces a discourse unique to people who have been taught to fear their own sexualities. This is evidenced by the use of terms such as “DL,” “discreet,” “clean,” “D/D free,” “NSA,” and “fwb.” Rather than embracing that sex between men does not necessarily make one gay, that sex outside of monogamy is not necessarily



unethical, that most sexually active adults have at one point or another contracted a sexually transmitted infection, or that sex outside of monogamy can be compassionate and loving, Casual Encounters users adhere to repressive ideologies about sex common in American culture. They use Craigslist to explore their sexualities while simultaneously using language that indicates their desire to adhere to the status quo. Although the Internet may allow people to shape, test, and transform (Gudelunas, 2005; Woodland, 2000) their sexual identities, this chapter demonstrates the pervasiveness of internalized homophobia, racism, sexism, and classism. Perhaps most important to Casual Encounters users is privacy. This is not a community of flagrant sex workers and out and proud queers; it is a community of quiet sexual minorities who use Craigslist as a primary outlet for sexual expression in a world that silences and surveils even “normal” sexual desires.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Perceptions of sexual deviance are unique to each culture. What is considered sexually acceptable is defined within the dominant ideologies of an era, of a geography, and of a political climate. In contemporary Western culture, sexuality is in part regulated by mass media systems. Mainstream news outlets serve as apparatuses for social control (see Althusser, 1971) while vernacular media and online communities provide opportunities for the production and distribution of counter-hegemonic discourses about sexuality. However, politically-motivated “alternative” media do not necessarily produce resistant narratives about sex. Media across the ideological spectrum facilitate discourses that monitor and regulate sexual expression. Newspapers, alternative magazines, and online discussion forums are crucial tools for establishing repressive sexual norms across social groups. To be a sexual subject is to be a body, and to be a body is to be policed.

Mass mediated messages about sexual acceptability and sexual deviance are an outcome of partnerships between journalists and their sources. Individuals’ descriptors of their own sexualities reflect cultural ideologies about sex. Although resistant discourses about sex may arise in self-representational media such as LGBTQ and feminist news outlets or online sex forums, hegemonic pressures influence even resistant definitions of acceptable sexuality. Sexual norms are established and monitored in the interest of dominant social actors. Sexuality is thus subject to disciplinary surveillance — a system of hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment, and examination (Foucault, 1977).

Importantly, sexual scripts circulate within and between media contexts, and

normalizing judgment can be observed in media made by and for marginalized communities and in expressions of individuals' sexualities online. Because normalizing judgment about sexuality is pervasive, sexual subjects in turn "watch, judge, and control our own behavior in accordance with a normalizing gaze" (Ells, 2003, p. 215). Although scholars have theorized about the emancipatory potential of the Internet and of the power of online disembodiment (see Reynolds, 2015, for an overview), this dissertation demonstrates that stigma and social acceptability are active forces in mass communication as well as in online communities of sexual Others. Sexual subjectivity online is not divorced from sexual subjectivity offline; online and offline identities overlap and intersect, informing one another as our realities converge in physical and digital spaces.

### **Sexual Deviance and Media Ideology**

This research identified a normalizing gaze within news narratives about Craigslist sex forums in high-circulation U.S. newspapers, in LGBTQ and feminist online magazines, and in self-expressions of sexuality in personal ads posted to Craigslist sex forums. The normalizing gaze is the dominant representational paradigm in discourse about Craigslist-mediated sexuality (see Hall, 1997, and Kuhn, 1970). Mass media, vernacular media, and online communities collectively work toward the hegemonic goal of policing the cultural limitations of socially acceptable (and legal) sexual expression. This dissertation's findings thus expand on theorizations of ideology in mass media and vernacular media described by Ono and Pham (2008). I demonstrate that mainstream outlets such as national U.S. newspapers produce and reproduce marginalizing messages

about social Others, while vernacular media such as LGBTQ and feminist magazines both resist and comply with hegemonic logics. These findings reflect and develop new theory drawing on Ono and Pham's studies of representation of Asian Americans in vernacular media, described in their book *Asian Americans in the Media* (2008).

Ono and Pham argued that self-representational vernacular media present more complex — but not necessarily radically resistant — messages about Asian Americans. They point to Asian American music groups and comedian Margaret Cho to argue that Asian Americans themselves present more authentic, sophisticated narratives about Asian American identity. This dissertation applied the same logic to LGBTQ and feminist media, theorizing alternative media as vernacular spaces for information about Craigslist sex forums. Based on Ono and Pham's theoretical investigations into Asian American identity construction in vernacular media, we might expect LGBTQ and feminist online magazines to be more sensitive to stories about sexuality and sexual personal ads. However, Ono and Pham (2008) cautioned scholars that vernacular media are not always oppositional. This seems to be especially true among LGBTQ and feminist online magazines covering Craigslist sex forums. My dissertation shows that LGBTQ and feminist publications marginalize and stigmatize sex workers and Internet-mediated sexuality in much the same ways as do mainstream U.S. newspapers. The lack of diversity in Craigslist sex coverage across different media suggests that Ono and Pham may have over-emphasized the emancipatory power of self-representational media.

This research evidences the continued role mass media play in maintaining social hierarchies in culture (Gramsci, 1971). Chapters 3 and 4 described how dominant

ideology influences *mass* media across the ideological spectrum. Mainstream newspapers and alternative online magazines produced stories about sex crimes and sex work, law and regulation, scandal, and online dating culture, which reflected social concerns about sexual Others online. Working as apparatuses of social control (Althusser, 1971), U.S. newspapers described Craigslist users primarily as prostitutes and human traffickers, as violent criminals, or as cheating politicians. They privileged the voices of law enforcement officials and policymakers in an apparent attempt to regulate sexually deviant behavior on Craigslist.

Responding to dominant ideology about Craigslist sex forums, vernacular alternative media published a polarized mix of assimilationist and activist messages about online sexuality. Like mainstream newspapers, LGBTQ and feminist online magazines stigmatized sex workers who used Craigslist to find clients. They also identified Craigslist's sex forums as petri dishes for teenaged murderers, serial killers, and wayward congressmen. Although LGBTQ and feminist online magazines identified Craigslist sex forums as particularly popular within the LGBTQ community, narratives about online dating dangers such as rampant sexism and disease acquisition were pervasive. Chapter 4 confirmed Ono and Pham's assertion that vernacular narratives can be, and often are more complex, but that they do not always carry a counter-hegemonic function (Ono & Pham, 2008).

**Hegemony and the news net.** Journalists are construed in the Western imaginary as left-leaning ideologues (see Domke, Watts, Shah, and Fan, 1999). They are perceived to work toward a liberal agenda, urging readers to embrace social change, including the

emancipation of sexual minorities and LGBTQ people. This research challenges the logic behind that stereotype. Although journalists may not be intentionally malicious toward sexual Others, their work depends on professionalized storytelling strategies that produce narratives that perpetuate the status quo. Indeed, news about Craigslist sex forums — and about all topics, really — is the outcome of normative reporting processes (see Tuchman, 1978a). By publishing primarily about deviant behavior and events, journalists highlight illegal and unethical activity resulting from communication on Craigslist sex forums. By relying on institutionalized news sources such as police, lawmakers, and court proceedings, journalists reproduced knowledge about Craigslist sex forums as criminal enterprises in the ideological interest of the “deviance-defining elite” (Ericson, Baranek & Chan, 1987). This is true of mainstream newspaper reportage and vernacular LGBTQ and feminist news, in which sex crimes are caught in the “news net” and framed through an institutional “web of facticity” (Tuchman, 1978a). It appears that journalists across the ideological media spectrum provide “definitions of social deviance,” which are “essentially expressions of dominant ideology in moral terms.” (Ericson, Baranek & Chan, 1987, p. 58) Articles published about Craigslist sex forums generally fit Michael Schudson’s (2003) definition of “Holy shit!” stories, which attract readers by highlighting conflict, violence, fear, and social or moral disorder. This dissertation builds upon news sociologists who have theorized deviance as news.

This dissertation expands previous theorizations of deviance in news and deviance as news. Tuchman (1977), Schudson (2003), and Ericson, Baranek & Chan (1987) described deviance reporting primarily in terms of crime, disease, disaster, scandal, and

other types of deviant behaviors and events. However, online sexuality has not been previously theorized as an element of deviance reporting. News about Craigslist sex forums is an example of the deviance-defining work journalists produce. The Internet has on its own presented many reporting challenges for journalists, and its intersections with gender and sexuality represent a compound moral threat. Theories of deviance as news must be expanded to recognize Internet-mediated sexuality as a type of social and moral disorder (in the eyes of the press). This dissertation demonstrates that Craigslist sex forums, and online sexuality in general, are covered in terms of social deviance. Future research should examine news coverage of the online dating apps Tinder, Grindr, and OkCupid; of pornographic websites; of extramarital affair websites such as Ashley Madison; of sugar dating and escort websites such as SeekingArrangement.com; and of sex trafficking on the dark web.

***Sexual identity and context collapse.*** In an attempt to differentiate hegemony in mass communication with hegemony in self-representational online media, communication theorists have argued that “within the safe cyberspaces of the Internet, identities can be shaped, tested, and transformed” (Gudelunas, 2005; Woodland, 2000). My findings suggest that contemporary theories of Internet-mediated sexuality must be updated to reflect context collapse, a phenomenon in which expressions of incongruent online identities are challenged by the flattening of social contexts (Marwick & boyd, 2011). Although context collapse was originally theorized as a form of lowest-common-denominator identity management in response to the large, homogenized audiences on social networking sites, it can be extended to the collapse of contexts between online and

offline selves as well. According to danah boyd, “The requirement to present a verifiable, singular identity makes it impossible to differ self-presentation strategies” online (Marwick & boyd, 2011, p. 123).

Years removed from the theatrics of early sex chatrooms, our sexualities are now enacted in hybrid spaces where online representations may turn into offline affairs. For this reason, Craigslist sex ads include relics of their posters’ social experiences offline. This is evidenced through the many posts made by “straight” MSM, or by virgins who turn to the Internet in hopes to alleviate stigma against their lack of sexual experience. In a 2015 article titled “How different are your online and offline personalities?” published in *The Guardian*, writer Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic outlined a diverse body of scholarship that links online habits to offline selves. In doing so, he concluded that “Although our digital identity may be fragmented, it seems clear that our various online personas are all digital breadcrumbs of the same persona; different symptoms of our same core self,” (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2015). This dissertation builds on these assertions, following the breadcrumbs of mediated sexual identity back to sexual scripts and cultural mores. Fundamentally, I offer a critique of the online disembodiment thesis that was popular in media studies through the early 2000s. The online disembodiment thesis argued that the lack of a physical body in Internet-mediated space “allows for a certain freedom of expression, of physical presentation and of experimentation beyond one’s own real-life limits” (McRae, 1997, p. 75).

Chapter 5 presented empirical evidence for context collapse between Craigslist sex forums and IRL expressions of sexuality, providing evidence that offline social



pressures have very real impacts on online sexual behavior. Self-surveillance was observed within the self-representational contexts of Craigslist's Casual Encounters sex forums, where individuals articulated their "taboo" sexual fantasies for an audience of similar sexual outsiders. While Casual Encounters forums provided an unregulated and nearly anonymous outlet for sexual exploration, many Craigslist users expressed shame and embarrassment about their sexual interests, while others sought sex partners online because meeting a partner organically offline limited their abilities to pursue their authentic sexual interests. Although Chapter 5 identified many productive discourses about sexuality among kink, polyamorous, and LGBTQ communities on Craigslist, it also demonstrated the pervasiveness of internalized homophobia, racism, sexism, and classism within even anonymous, self-representational spaces. These competing ideologies point to the fragmented nature of sexual scripts among sexual subjects. Much like actors on a stage, individuals "perform" their sex roles, which they enact using sexual scripts learned through interactions with others, the self, and culture as a whole (Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Simon & Gagnon, 1984). On one hand, Craigslist sex forums allow users to perform sexualities that resist mainstream narratives about sexual acceptability. On the other hand, Craigslist produces an underground culture of unregulated white masculine sexuality, which is rife with paranoias and phobias present among white men writ large.

**Sexual rhetorics.** Simply understood, rhetoric is the art of persuasive discourse. Normalizing judgment's hegemonic function must necessarily be realized through rhetorical positioning. We can see the rhetoric of normalizing judgment in the word choices used in reportage about Craigslist sex forums, and within the sex forums

themselves. In national U.S. newspapers, the word “prostitution” and “prostitute” were used 34 times more often than the preferred terms of “sex work” and “sex worker.” Likewise the term “sex trafficking” was employed liberally to describe the relationships between Craigslist and sex workers, who were framed by newspapers as unwillingly participating in the sex trade. This removes crucial agency from sex workers, who have used online sex forums to supersede their need for a pimp. “Sex trafficking” also evokes images of naïve, helpless girls who have been torn from their homes and forced into the illegal sex trade. These rhetorical tools, which Otherize and criminalize sex workers, help bolster support for formal disciplinary surveillance on Craigslist by police and legal authorities.

Likewise, LGBTQ and feminist online magazines use rhetorics that support their ideological positions. For instance, the term “gay” was used more than five times more often than the word “lesbian,” and more than eleven times more often than the word “bisexual.” Certainly this reflects LGBTQ online magazines’ target audiences while demonstrating the cis-het lens through which feminist magazines articulate their activisms. And while the use of “prostitute” and “prostitution” was statistically less common in LGBTQ and feminist online magazines than in mainstream U.S. newspapers, it was still used more than twice as often as “sex worker” and “sex work.” LGBTQ and feminist online magazines used terms related to human trafficking more than five times more often than “pimp” and “pimping,” removing agency from sex workers just like newspapers did. Although alternative media market themselves by promising resistant discourses that work toward the activist goals purported to interest their readerships, their

rhetorics continue to marginalize sexual subjects and displace agency from sex workers and certain sexual minorities, e.g. lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender people.

We see similar discursive strategies employed in personal ads posted to Craigslist Casual Encounters forums. In Chapter 5, I was attentive to the acronyms and slang employed by Casual Encounters posters. Acronyms and slang are rhetorical strategies used to establish ad writers as part of Craigslist's in-group; knowledge of the forums' linguistic strategies identifies a poster as a more authentic, trustworthy member of the Craigslist community. But beyond that, acronyms and slang were employed in the ideological interest of posters' identities. The word "discreet" was used to signal that advertisers were aware of social stigma against their sexual interests. Discretion is demanded of potential partners as a form of self-censorship. (To be "out" as a cheater or as a man who has sex with men may challenge the hegemony of posters' offline social milieu). To that end, the supremacy of heterosexual masculinity was evidenced the overwhelming use of the terms like "straight," "str8," and "straight-acting" by MSM. On Casual Encounters forums, rhetoric is used in the interest of dominant sexual scripts, reflecting the shame and stigma marginalized sexual subjects experience interacting even with other sexual Others in an anonymous, online space.

### **Methodological Contributions**

Beyond its ideological critiques and qualitative findings, this dissertation makes important methodological contributions to mass communication research. In Figure 1, I provide a schematic for a constant-comparative method for qualitative coding in the tradition of critical discourse analysis (CDA). This schematic offers a roadmap for CDA

scholars to investigate meaning across time periods and various media platforms.

Although CDA is a useful methodological perspective from which to analyze “the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (van Dijk, 2008a), there has been no consensus about a step-by-step method that mass communication researchers can apply when conducting their analyses. Norman Fairclough recommended a social scientific method for CDA that:

- 1) identifies a social problem drawing on intertextual elements of the historical archive (see this dissertation’s literature review),
- 2) identifies discursive and semiotic obstacles to resolution of the social problem, including the systems of production, the intertextuality of meanings about the social problem, and the representation of the problem itself,
- 3) considers whether the social order (hegemony) depends on the social problem,
- 4) identifies potential ways past the social obstacle, and
- 5) reflects critically on the analysis itself (Fairclough, 2001).

While Fairclough’s recommendations clarify the objectives of CDA, his method remains unclear in terms of coding procedure. CDA approaches from mass communication are equally vague, defining research methods that identified “emergent themes and frames” and “relied on emergent coding” (DeFoster, 2015) or as an initial “first-level” close reading of a text followed by a “second-level” critical analysis (Brabham, 2012).

My dissertation’s methods section provides a rigorous, empirical coding method that mass communication and CDA scholars can follow in order to build social scientific

evidence for ideologically invested critique. The first- and second-cycle coding procedure described in Chapter 3 should be partnered with a constant-comparative approach to data analysis. Findings from analysis across the ideological media spectrum should be contrasted in order to build theory about the role of ideology mediated texts.

CDA lets mass communication scholars examine the inherent tensions in discourse — for example, stigma versus social accountability and mainstream narratives versus alternative narratives. Rather than looking for consistent themes across mediated objects, CDA seeks out the contradictions and the inconsistencies in mediated logic. It is equally effective at illustrating hegemony and counter-hegemony present in single texts as it is illustrating those phenomena in multiple, disparate communication contexts. For this reason, CDA should be applied by researchers working in comparative traditions, and by qualitative researchers interested in questions about power and representation.

### **Recommendations for the Field**

Normalizing judgment is the outcome of an institutionalized, habitualized system of newsgathering and news writing. Reportage about Craigslist sex forums reflects the values of its producers, their production methods, and the culture surrounding production. Journalism itself is a normative industry (Tuchman, 1978a) that reflects the surveilling goals of its most prominent sources: the deviance-defining elite (Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1987). Drawing on the results of this dissertation as well as other studies of deviance as news (e.g. *Visualizing Deviance*), journalists should endeavor toward a more reflexive style of news reporting — one that acknowledges the bureaucratic procedures and institutional influences that imprint the industry with its normalizing and deviance-

defining logics. Although journalists pride themselves on a professional ethos of truth telling and objectivity, this research illustrates that truth and objectivity are products of dominant ideology. By privileging authorized knowers such as government officials, police officers, public health officials, and academic researchers, journalists prevent themselves from achieving those cornerstones of journalistic integrity.

An important element of critical discourse analysis (the method used in this dissertation) is to analyze not only what is said, but also what is not said. Professionalized reporters should reflect on what they are *not* saying about Craigslist sex forums, and how lack of coverage and lack of sourcing may contribute to the symbolic annihilation of marginalized voices (Tuchman, 1978a), including the voices of sex workers, LGBTQ people, drug dealers, non-monogamous daters, and kink and BDSM communities. Because ideology is pervasive, news coverage of sexuality will never rid itself of deviance discourse or of normalizing judgment. This is the outcome of relying on sources to produce news content. However, reporters at mainstream outlets and alternative media could produce narratives that privilege alternative sexualities by augmenting their sourcing practices. In the case of Craigslist sex forum coverage, counter-hegemonic potentials could have been actualized by sourcing sex workers rather than police reports or by interviewing laypeople on Craigslist rather than “experts” of online communities.

To produce more objective, truthful stories about sex, journalists much not be dissuaded from approaching sexual Others. As a warning, these are sources who may be resistant to mainstream narratives about sex and thus wary of relationships with the press. This presents a challenge to the deadline-driven reporting routine, which is served by

journalists embedded in beats where public officials are available for immediate comment on breaking stories. Indeed, paltry budgets and the 24/7 news cycle present challenges to longform and investigative reporting. And it is absolutely more difficult to locate and liaise with everyday people who use websites like Craigslist Casual Encounters rather than relying on those tried and true official sources. Journalists should be less hesitant about reaching out to sources on social media and online dating platforms, Craigslist sex forums included. Researchers and public health interventionists have long harnessed the power of Craigslist-mediated study recruitment (see Grov, Ventuneac, Rendina, Jimenez, & Parsons, 2013), and it would do well for journalists to follow suit. Craigslist's favorable relationship with scholars suggests founder and CEO Craig Newmark may be open to a non-combative relationship with the press. There is no indication that journalists are unwelcome on Craigslist based on Craigslist's terms of use (Craigslist, 2017b), should journalists choose to seek sources directly from Craigslist personal ad forums. It seems that journalists may be more bitter with Craigslist than Craigslist is with journalists — perhaps because Craigslist sapped crucial personal ad dollars from a floundering news industry in the early 2000s.

Finally, in order to tell more nuanced stories about sexuality and online identity, editors should strive to diversify their newsrooms. Newsrooms notoriously under-represent women and people of color. In census data released for the year 2014, more than 37 percent of Americans were of minority racial backgrounds, and roughly 50 percent of the national population was female (United States Census Bureau, 2017). However, a census of newsroom employees conducted by the American Society of News

Editors found that in 2015, just less than 13 percent of newsroom staffers were people of color (American Society of News Editors, 2015). And women comprised roughly one-third of newsroom employees (American Society of News Editors, 2016).

Underrepresentation of minorities in mass communication is well established in literature produced by industry oversight organizations. However, I could identify no data about the representation of LGBTQ or other sexual minorities on newsroom staffs. I will wager that mainstream national newspapers also underrepresent the voices of LGBTQ people — especially transgender people — on their mastheads. Recent Gallup polls demonstrate that young people are increasingly identifying on the LGBTQ spectrum (Gates, 2017), a trend that may continue given the paradigm shift toward LGBTQ acceptance in the wake of the HIV/AIDS crisis. In order to diversify the types of narratives crafted about sexuality and online identity, it is crucial that newsrooms actively hire LGBTQ people, women, and people of color. It is also paramount that news editors hire millennials into feature reporting roles rather than pigeonholing them into social media and news aggregation roles. Millennials are digital natives with first-hand understandings of online communities and digital discourse. They are excellent resources for stories that involve the tensions and contradictions of online existence.

### **Research Limitations**

Discourse is infinitely traceable and ever evolving. This dissertation provides a snapshot of a specific type of discourse about online-mediated sexuality at a specific moment in history. It traces the evolution of mass mediated knowledges about Craigslist sex forums alongside the evolution of a culture particular to Craigslist's Casual



Encounter sex forums. Although this dissertation comments on cultural processes and sexual scripts, it is necessarily limited to the cases and time period discussed.

Normalizing logics are an essential component of modern media, and defining deviance is one of mass media's primary functions. But normalizing judgment changes over time and with new social, political, and economic paradigms. A more traditional Foucaultian analysis might dig further back in those archives of discourse about sexual deviance, using archaeology or genealogy to analyze the psychoanalytic and behaviorist concepts I outlined in Chapter 1. This dissertation is thus limited by its own research scope. By focusing on Craigslist sex forums' representations in contemporary media culture, I necessarily limit my ability to comment on earlier and evolving discourses about sexual deviance and the normalizing gaze.

This dissertation's sampling strategy presented another important limitation. Because I relied on the archival work done by ProQuest and by news outlets' digital staffs, it is possible I missed news stories published about Craigslist sex forums but not captured by my literature search. For instance, LGBTQ and feminist online magazines may have published about Craigslist sex forums before 2005, but they may have only begun archiving those stories on their websites that year. Likewise, in sampling U.S. newspaper articles, I was subject to ProQuest's archival strategy and search algorithms. I turned to the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine for assistance in sampling Craigslist Casual Encounters personal ads, which are ephemeral by design. The Wayback Machine only captured headlines for ads posted to the Los Angeles personal ad forums, and a number of posts from New York City were captured by the Wayback Machine but

removed by Craigslist moderators before those captures. Although I analyzed the census of articles about Craigslist sex forums published in the sampled newspapers and online magazines, that census may be somewhat misleading. And although I analyzed all of the Casual Encounters posts sampled in the selected cities on the selected dates, there were notable holes in the available content. Further, an analysis of sexual self-expression on additional online dating sites would have revealed interesting insights and opportunities for comparative analysis. However, sampling discourse from the Internet poses methodological challenges because most online dating forums, apps, and sites circulate private data protected by user log-in pages. Craigslist is one of few public media that allow for sexual exchanges, and thus one of the few sites available for research without extensive IRB review. Researchers should investigate how they might assess user behavior on Tinder, Grindr, OkCupid, Ashley Madison, SeekingArrangement, and other platforms for arranging dates and casual sex given that IRB limits access to raw data.

Of course, this dissertation is also limited by its critical, interpretive methodology. Critical discourse analysis is interested foremost in identifying and describing the evolution of ideological positions within bodies of discourse. Other methodologies would yield different insights into the construction of normalizing judgment and deviance discourse in media contexts. A quantitative content analysis might provide more detailed evidence of specific words used to define deviance, and multiple trained coders would provide intercoder reliability not expected of CDA. On the other hand, a more formal Marxist analysis might identify tensions between the ruling elite, the press, and the

subjugated audiences described in this research. Research paradigms invariably limit the outcomes of the research they produce.

Finally, I should acknowledge the ways my own identity influences the research conducted in this dissertation. As a queer woman scholar and working journalist, I bring certain lenses into my analysis that perhaps would not be present among straight women, men, or those who have limited experience with the news industry. My own political orientation is left of center, and I am an outspoken advocate for feminism, LGBTQ rights, and the dismantling of normative sexual scripts. Like all scholars, I cannot divorce my analysis from my own ideological position. This dissertation helps evidence the elite interests of mainstream media and the ideological ramifications of normalizing judgment on marginalized communities. My research has a subtle activist agenda.

### **Future Research**

I have identified an increasingly important limitation to this study that demands additional investigation. Beginning with its earliest iterations, Craigslist syphoned personal advertising from newspapers' and magazines' back pages. Personal ad pages were historically a primary financial subsidy for mass media business models. Future research should examine the decline of mass media personal ad funding in relationships to Craigslist's national rollout. I encourage media economists to research the relationship between online personal advertising and the dissolution of the mainstream newspaper industry beginning in the early 2000s.

Scholars should also continue investigating the roles newsroom demographics play in news production. This analysis would benefit from interviews with journalists

who produced news about Craigslist sex forums. Newsroom ethnographies would also provide important insights into the construction of deviance-defining messages and normalizing judgment in news about Internet-mediated sexuality. Reporters absolutely shape the content they produce. If newsrooms are predominantly white, male, and upper-middle class, they will create media that reflect the values of their staffs. It would be interesting to learn what the newsrooms look like at LGBTQ and feminist online magazines, and whether workforce representation of women, LGBTQ folks, and people of color is significantly better in those outlets.

Finally, social science research about Craigslist must be diversified. Almost all of the scholarship about Craigslist focuses on public health interventions and HIV/AIDS. While this is an important area of investigation, it continues to stigmatize Craigslist users as vectors for infectious disease. Mass communication and cultural studies scholars should join in efforts to analyze the communities and cultures developing organically on Craigslist and other online outlets for sexual expression. Craigslist is an important public medium through which to analyze sexual ideology and Internet-mediated sexuality.

## Tables

Table 1

### *Coverage by Newspapers 2003-2016*

Newspaper Title	<i>N</i>	%
<i>Chicago Tribune</i>	80	28.6
<i>Denver Post</i>	10	3.6
<i>Los Angeles Times</i>	50	17.9
<i>New York Times</i>	55	19.6
<i>USA Today</i>	8	2.9
<i>Wall Street Journal</i>	12	4.3
<i>Washington Post</i>	65	23.2
Totals ( <i>N</i> =280)	280	100

Table 2

### *Newspaper Coverage by Time Period 2003-2016*

Years Covered	<i>N</i>	%
2003 - 2007	48	17.1
2008 - 2009	84	30
2010 - 2011	71	25.4
2012 - 2013	36	12.9
2014 - 2016	41	14.6
Totals ( <i>N</i> =280)	280	100

Table 3

*Topics in Newspaper Coverage 2003-2016*

Topic	<i>N</i>	%
Business & Economy	9	3.2
Law & Regulation	54	19.3
Media	4	1.4
Online Dating Culture	31	11.1
Public Health	8	2.9
Scandal	34	12.1
Sex Crimes & Sex Work	140	50
Totals ( <i>N</i> =280)	280	100

Table 4

*Sex Crimes and Sex Work in Newspaper Coverage 2003-2016*

Topic	Sex Crimes	Sex Work	Total (%)
2003 - 2007	24	3	27 (9.7)
2008 - 2009	36	5	41 (29.3)
2010 - 2011	15	2	17 (12.1)
2012 - 2013	22	3	25 (17.9)
2014 - 2016	53	2	30 (21.4)
Total	125	15	140 (100)

Table 5

*Sex Worker-Related Terms in Newspaper Coverage 2003-2016*

Topic	Prostitution Discourse (N)	Sex Worker Discourse (N)
2003-2007	133	0
2008-2009	297	0
2010-2011	165	12
2012-2013	104	2
2014-2016	88	9
Totals (N=810)	787	23

Table 6

*Pimp-Related Terms in Newspaper Coverage 2003-2016*

Topic	Pimp-Related Discourse (N)	%
2003-2007	5	4.6
2008-2009	25	23
2010-2011	18	16.5
2012-2013	25	23
2014-2016	36	33
Totals	109	100

Table 7

*Trafficking-Related Terms in Newspaper Coverage 2003-2016*

Topic	Trafficking Discourse (N)	%
2003-2007	0	0
2008-2009	35	13.5
2010-2011	101	38.8
2012-2013	67	25.8
2014-2016	57	21.9
Totals	260	100

Table 8

*Law and Regulation in Newspaper Coverage 2003-2016*

Topic	<i>N</i>	%
2003-2007	2	3.7
2008-2009	24	44.4
2010-2011	22	40.7
2012-2013	2	3.7
2014-2016	3	5.6
Total	54	100

Table 9

*Scandal in Newspaper Coverage 2003-2016*

Topic	<i>N</i>	%
2003-2007	2	5.9
2008-2009	6	17.6
2010-2011	21	61.8
2012-2013	4	11.8
2014-2016	1	2.9
Total	34	100

Table 10

*Online Dating Culture in Newspaper Coverage 2003-2016*

Topic	<i>N</i>	%
2003-2007	11	35.5
2008-2009	9	29
2010-2011	3	9.7
2012-2013	4	12.9
2014-2016	4	12.9
Total	31	100



Table 11

*Coverage by LGBTQ + Feminist Media 2005-2016*

Outlet Title	<i>N</i>	%
<i>The Advocate</i>	57	43.8
<i>Bitch</i>	17	13.1
<i>Feministing</i>	16	12.3
<i>Ms. Magazine</i>	12	9.2
<i>Out.com</i>	21	16.2
<i>Pride.com</i>	7	5.4
Totals ( <i>N</i> =130)	130	100

Table 12

*LGBTQ + Feminist News Coverage by Time Period*

Years Covered	<i>N</i>	%
2005 - 2007	9	6.9
2008 - 2009	16	12.3
2010 - 2011	60	46.2
2012 - 2013	22	16.9
2014 - 2016	23	17.7
Totals ( <i>N</i> =130)	130	100

Table 13

*Topics in LGBTQ + Feminist News Coverage 2005-2016*

Topic	<i>N</i>	%
Business & Economy	0	0
Law & Regulation	18	13.8
Related Media	17	13.1
Online Dating Culture	42	32.3
Public Health	2	1.5
Scandal	16	12.3
Sex Crimes & Sex Work	35	26.9
Totals ( <i>N</i> =130)	130	100

Table 14

*Online Dating Culture in LGBTQ and Feminist News Coverage 2005-2016*

Topic	<i>N</i>	%
2005 - 2007	6	14.3
2008 - 2009	8	19
2010 - 2011	8	19
2012 - 2013	10	23.8
2014 - 2016	10	23.8
Total	42	100

Table 15

*Orientation Terminology in LGBTQ and Feminist News Coverage 2005-2016*

Term	Lesbian	Gay	Bisexual	Total
2005 - 2007	2	50	1	53
2008 - 2009	17	81	2	100
2010 - 2011	5	46	2	53
2012 - 2013	16	59	0	75
2014 - 2016	18	78	22	118
Total	58	314	27	399

Table 16

*Sex Worker-Related Terms in LGBTQ and Feminist News Coverage 2005-2016*

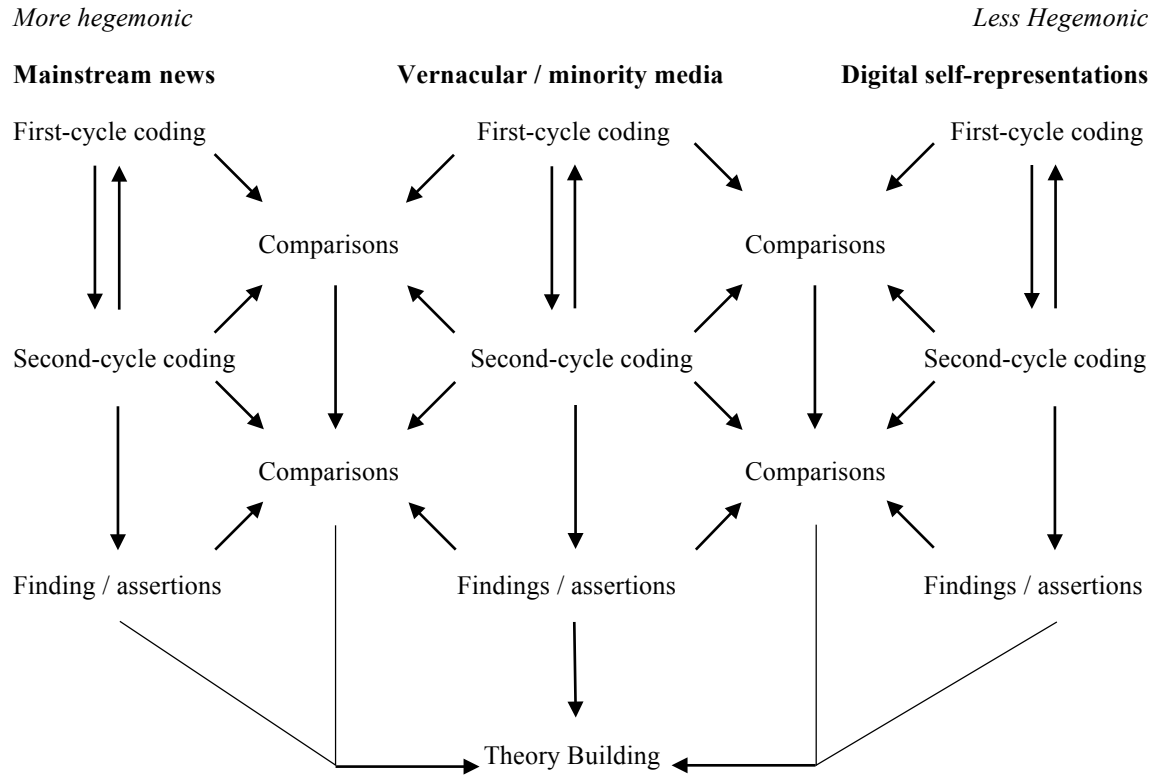
Topic	Prostitution Discourse (N)	Sex Worker (N)
2003-2007	2	0
2008-2009	7	3
2010-2011	81	25
2012-2013	2	1
2014-2016	10	12
Totals (N=)	102	41

Table 17

*Pimp-Related Terms in LGBTQ and Feminist News Coverage 2005-2016*

Topic	Pimp-Related Discourse (N)	Human Trafficker (N)
2003-2007	0	0
2008-2009	0	0
2010-2011	24	95
2012-2013	2	3
2014-2016	2	30
Totals	26	128

**Figure 1: A Qualitative Coding Model for Critical Discourse Analysis**



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## Appendix A: Newspaper Articles Sampled

*Listed chronologically*

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## **Appendix C: Craigslist Casual Encounters Ads Sampled**

*Listed chronologically*

I'm off Friday, want to meet... (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City.  
Craigslist.org.

Let me pleasure you both (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City.  
Craigslist.org.

Re: BBW Seeking M (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

My vagina doesn't lubricate (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City.  
Craigslist.org.

There is a bet between (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City.  
Craigslist.org.

Have xcellent oral skills (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City.  
Craigslist.org.

Free Room in House With Pool (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City.  
Craigslist.org.

Any GAM or Bi AM (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Gymnast hot bod (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Gwm seeks two GBM (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City.  
Craigslist.org.

horny sexy rainy (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

ok, so i'm high (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Anyone up late (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

25 male looking (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Sexy guy with nice cock (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City.  
Craigslist.org.

Looking for a sex submissive (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City.  
Craigslist.org.

A HOT FANTASY (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Just got in and in the mood (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City.  
Craigslist.org.

fuck the fuck that flaged me (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City.  
Craigslist.org.

a very simple offer (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Dominant female wanted (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City.  
Craigslist.org.

Seeking a woman that loves (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City.  
Craigslist.org.

Coco stick 4u (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

6'2 hazel eyes (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Need a little help (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

24 yr old virgin (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Come get my \$\$\$ (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Wanna watch me play? (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City.  
Craigslist.org.

Nude beach anyone? (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Cool guy up for meeting (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City.  
Craigslist.org.

Laid back shaggy haired (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City.  
Craigslist.org.

Teach me how to eat (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Do you have thick pussy lips? (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City.  
Craigslist.org.

Seeking Older Woman (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

the cats away and... (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Lets chill with some vitamin C (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

I Love the Female Body (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Horny guy northside williamsburg (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Anonymous Blowjob for Well-Endowed (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

VGL shemale looking (2003, July 31). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Would you fulfill my fantasy (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

In Touch Bodywork... (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

St8 / masc / bi hot (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Cute uncut white boyish... (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

I want a massage (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Looking for top Latino (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Hung SWM wants... (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Typical male seeks... (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Any Hot Ladies... (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Kinky & Erotic (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.



Looking for Late-Night... (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Free Friday? (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Asian Women Looking... (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Late Night Orgasm (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

VGL, young... (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Friday Daytime Discreet (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Jaded with Dating (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

My apt, drinks, 420... (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

I need a black BBW (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Just looking for... (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Any young ladies... (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Britishguy available (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Attractive, tall, swm (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Party Girl? (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Are you bored tonight? (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Regular guy seeks (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

No games, let's trade... (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Erotic full body massage (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Oral servicing (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

I'm a loser (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Lets talk baby (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Not working tomorrow? (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Anybody want to get licked (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Please reply only if (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Its raining again (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

I got weed... (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Let's play (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Thurs night, need intimacy (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Seeking Latina or Asian (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Seeking a woman who loves (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Intelligent guy seeking (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

m4w (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Man 4 Woman 4 NSA (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Looking 4 F to have a naughty (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Hot guy lookin (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Fuck my boyfriend... (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

While she's tied up... (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Seeking very oral (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Shower for Punishment (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Take my photo now... (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

After work service (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

What do YOU want to see... (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

re: I'm Far From... (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

I'm Far From... (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Anyone know what Outwar? (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Take me to a show (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Wide Open Pussy (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

My Night! (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Fun, Fun, Fun (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Any older men? (2003, Aug. 1). Casual Encounters: New York City. Craigslist.org.

Straight, looking to experiment (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

ucla quiet spots? (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

Want A Party Now (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

gl white/hisp seeking (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

bj for horny straight (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

tall white bro for similar top (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

get some mindblowing head (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslislist.org.

Small Frame For Same (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslislist.org.

any OLDER str8m (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslislist.org.

let's play ball (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslislist.org.

if the P.R.I.C.E. is (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslislist.org.

Hey Guys (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslislist.org.

Good guy seeks similar (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslislist.org.

NICE BUNS, LOTS (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslislist.org.

Sexy outgoing guy looking (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslislist.org.

I put the FU back in FUN (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslislist.org.

If you Persian or Armenian (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslislist.org.

i am looking for a hook (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslislist.org.

Blow you in your car (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslislist.org.

glory hole open for big black (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslislist.org.

Swing time with a kinky (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslislist.org.

Open minded hot guy 4 couples (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslislist.org.

Kinky Bi Male Horny (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslislist.org.

VIRGIN CURIOUS GUY LOOKING (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslislist.org.

Just curious (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslislist.org.

Anyone lonely near santa (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslist.org.

Want to bottom for a hot ts (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslist.org.

if the P.R.I.C.E. is (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

)))) Looking to hook up (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslist.org.

Need to top a TS TONIGHT! (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslist.org.

Horny and I can host NOW (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslist.org.

nsa fun (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

very fem asian T girl (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

seeking passable ts lady (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

WATCHING PORN, REAL HORNED (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslist.org.

What r u doing tonite (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

White 7.5 inch thick and cut (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslist.org.

I love the pussy (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

Looking for a little fun (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

GANG BANG THIS SATURDAY (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslist.org.

virgin looking for a hot bbw (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslist.org.

How sick and twisted are you really (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslist.org.

Which set of lips should I kiss? (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

Cougar (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

Are you a submissive slut that needs to be trained? (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

Armenian guy visiting (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

Looking for a hot cool republican (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

my tongue my fingers your happiness (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

Cum 2 u now!! (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

420 and gotta like shoes (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

Goodlooking guy seeking (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

VIRGIN NEEDS HELP (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

ANYONE DOWN TO MEET UP RIGHT NOW (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

mindblowing fun, for the right (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

Looking for ski bunny (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

hi there (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

hot fuck (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

Look for a horny freaky fast (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

Beach Body Hottie (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

FWB WANTED ~ (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

VERY GOOD LOOKING GUY (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslist.org.

looking for mutual webcam (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslist.org.

Love hot phone? Let's have fun (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslist.org.

I'll suck you off, no strings (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslist.org.

Sort of Older for Sort of Younger (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslist.org.

Two hung guys in who (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

Two for 1 special (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

Swap partners? (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

Hot energetic young couple seeking (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslist.org.

looking for fun and lovable guy (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslist.org.

SEXY PASSABLE CD (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

need UNCUT dick to suck (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslist.org.

Sexy, tight and young (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

Looking 4 hung young guys (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslist.org.

WAITING FOR HUNG GUY (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslist.org.

LATINA CD.. LOOKING (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslist.org.

CD seeking a nice (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

Not looking for just anyone (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslist.org.

Attractive and thin female (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslist.org.

Do you wanna slide your d!ck (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslist.org.

Looking for a good man!!! (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslist.org.

hi all you black man out there (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslist.org.

Hey there guys (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

Looking for someone to make me laught! (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

Does this work? (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

DEEPTHROAT. ANYONE? (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslist.org.

Cute older woman (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

I want a dom kinky friend (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslist.org.

PETITE BLUE EYED RUSSIAN (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslist.org.

I will explain what i want (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslist.org.

\*TIRED OF BEING ALONE BABY? (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslist.org.

Easy-going an needing a date (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles.  
Craigslist.org.



make me feel like a woman! (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

Slide down my throat (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

tired of being a good girl (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

Nervous but excited and curious (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

mixed beauty seeking playmate (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

drunk any1 wanna drive (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

I need a repeat (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

do you have a gf? let's talk about (2009, Jan. 16). Casual Encounters: Los Angeles. Craigslist.org.

DILF seeks younger (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Dad looking for son (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Gen cocksucker looking (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Big Burly SUB Seeks Similar (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Odd Question - Need Answers (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Wanna buss this morning load ASAP (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Married for married (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Straight dl for same (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

LOOKING FOR TWINKS (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Sexy p.r bttm (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Head for Straight guys (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

I love riding a cock (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

pilot truck stop (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Any quick cummers (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: New York. Craigslist.org.

I need some masculine buddies! (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Looking for a dick now (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Uncircumcised / Uncut? (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

GENTleman seeks (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

GENTleman seeks young Latino top (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Stockings/Nylons Phone (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Visiting (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

HOT GUYS ONLY (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Me!!! (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

I need a bj YOU host (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Can I sit on Santa's lap? (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

doing massages or? (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

I need to suck some dick (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

not hung but still like (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Cum by and hang out (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

masc hung stud (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Professional gay auto repair (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Anyone need a good handjob (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

24 twink for hookup (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Stroke me (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Looking 4 big white dick (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

I'm horny for a hot cock (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Work my load out (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Black Cherry Bottom (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Fuck my throat (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

hosting now (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

I want to get gang banged (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

I just want to be your slave (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

i want to get fucked (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

looking for fun (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Vas safe bi guy (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

big thick white top (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Calling all kinky bisexual people (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Power Bottom Jock (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Fill me with your cum (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Pantyhose fun? (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Married Bi Young (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Looking to make a friend (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Looking for my TS princess (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Any sexy passable TS ladies (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Need this dick drained (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

ANAL RIMMING, ORGASM (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

looking for a young hottie (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

ORAL PLEASURE DURING YOUR PERIOD (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Handsome black man ISO (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Master seeks older sub female (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Seeking Female Breasts Play (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Young and wild (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Porn and mutual masturbation (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Seeking Female Weekend (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

MWM Seeks Female FWB (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Ignite Passion for life (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Winter in Chicago (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Trained Massage Therapist (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Attractive, Well Hung Male Seeking (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

looking for chubby girl (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Are you married or have a bf (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Cleaning woman (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Looking for a MILF (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Rockstar available (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Warm up and put that (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Latina Gurnee (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Looking for care free fun (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

SEPARATED LOOKING FOR FWB (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Not enough time for a relationship (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

HORNI PUSSI EATER (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Are you a young, hot chick (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

IT MUST BE HAIRY (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Younger male for BBW (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

father's love (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Sit on my face. Bring some friends. (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Looking for younger guy (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Searching for new third (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Looking for a male today (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Just Watch or Give Us Some (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Couple looking for a female (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

fun (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Transguy looking for fun (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

\*\*Hot guys in their late 20's (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Snow white party (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

BBW looking 4 younger guy (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago.  
Craigslist.org.

\*\* real sex..with privacy (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

Doggy Style sex!! (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.

HOT & HORNY LATINA (2016, Dec. 21). Casual Encounters: Chicago. Craigslist.org.