

Jiggy Jiggy

WHEN I FIRST STARTED my research in Durban, the sugar girls told me that many Filipino seamen liked to sew little plastic beads into the shaft of their penises. They're called *ballitos*, meaning 'little balls'.

I didn't believe it, but the women insisted it was true. When I asked the Filipino seamen about this, they nonchalantly acknowledged it as a common practice, especially among the older sailors, but they said it was dying out among the younger generation. (The 'body modification community' calls this *pearling* or *genital beading*.) They said that they put these *ballitos* in their penises to make them feel manlier, more part of the crew and more studly with the women. Essentially, they do it to boost their sense of masculine identity, to promote male bonding with other beaded sailors and to make them feel like Casanovas in the sack.

So how do they do it? Most sailors insert their own *ballitos* by making a small incision in the shaft, inserting a small silicone bead under the skin and then sewing it shut. Some have friends help. It's incredibly painful.

As far as styles go, three patterns stand out. The first is the single *ballito* on the top of the shaft. This targets the clitoris at the deepest point of penetration. The second is a row of *ballitos* across the top of the penis, which repeatedly bumps against the clitoris for maximum stimulation. And the third is a comprehensive cover of *ballitos* around the phallus. This style is chosen primarily for aesthetic purposes, but it is also meant to excite a woman's vaginal wall during intercourse.

The Filipinos said that they learnt this practice from Japanese sailors many years back. *Yakuza* members are known to do this and may have

introduced it to the older Asian seamen. But most of the sugar girls find it a strange custom, and some refuse to go with men who have *ballitos*, taking it as a sign of poor character and health. Gaironisa once turned down a sailor who bragged that he had twenty *ballitos* studding his shaft because, from previous experience, she found it too painful. But Enele, a young Zulu woman in Durban, got a twinkle in her eye when she thought about it. She said, ‘Yeah, those *ballitos* add a little something extra.’

We have finally arrived at the chapter that supposedly constitutes the core of any discussion of prostitution: sex – or what the sugar girls and seamen refer to simply as *jiggy jiggy*. I say ‘supposedly’ because, as this book shows, these women spend the bulk of their time hustling and soliciting clients, not sexing them up. In fact, for some women, the sex act is so rare that it seems almost odd to call them prostitutes at all. They market sex but they rarely actually sell it. (Does that still make them sex workers?)

Of course, the availability of sexual satisfaction is central to dockside recreation. It’s the defining feature of the sailor–sugar girl relationship around which all the other club amusements spin. In fact, these other diversions gain greater value if they’re connected to the eventuality of sex. For the women, however, sex is crucial because it’s the most expensive service they provide. It’s also the riskiest and the one that attracts the most social condemnation.

So how do these women service their clients? Let’s go through it step by sweaty step.

Where to Do It

If a woman is fortunate enough to negotiate a sexual contract at the club, it’s often quite apparent to everyone. As she stands up to leave, she radiates a certain satisfaction – not because she’s about to get it on, but because she’s about to earn a lot more money than she would by staying at the club. She also enhances her prestige among her peers as they witness her success. Though many women complain that sex is the worst part of their work, it’s the ticket to real income. They don’t hide the fact that they’re pleased when they successfully land a client.

Once they’ve negotiated the deal, the couple choose where to get

intimate. They have a few variables to consider. What time must the sailor return to his ship? This impacts on how far away they can go from the harbour. How much money is he willing to spend for accommodation? This influences whether they go to a hotel, a matriarch's house, the woman's flat or (less likely) the ship. Does the woman have a default preference? This speaks to the kind of place where she feels comfortable. Whatever the woman chooses, the man typically complies.

Cape Town and Durban offer plenty of cheap hotels for these kinds of hook-ups. Women who live at home with their families tend to prefer hotels because there they can carry out their business beyond family or community surveillance. Hotels usually cost the client around R150 per night. Ladies who live with other pros often go to their own places for sex. Not only is it safer, but the women can then ask for an extra R100 to R150, the fee that the guy would have paid if they went to a hotel. Other women who live with matriarchs are supposed to take their marks home so that the matriarch can get the R100 lodging fee; this is part of their arrangement.

In years past, it was common to have sex on the ships. The cabby would smuggle the woman into the harbour or simply bribe the security guard to let her in. This was beneficial for her because she could avoid bringing her work home with her. The men liked it because it wiped out the lodging fee. In addition, many captains preferred their crew to bring their partners to the ship so they could keep track of their men. But, for security reasons, sex on the ship is rare now.

Foreplay

Once the couple get behind closed doors, the sugar girl determines how to fulfil her contract. This will depend on the nationality of the client, how much time he's got and how happy she feels about the money she's getting. At one extreme, if the guy's a low-ranking Chinese sailor with very little time or money, she'll try to complete the job with haste. She won't bother with bathing, massaging or foreplay. At the other extreme, if he's a high-ranking Japanese officer with plenty of time and money, she'll deliver five-star treatment.

When the couple make it to the bedroom and strip down, they usually reek from smoke and sweat from the clubs. Many men don't care and just want to get busy. But with bigger spenders, the women

like to take their time and set the mood by getting themselves cleaned up. Then they lie on the bed where she caresses him, gives him a back rub or kisses him. One way the women get their men excited is to massage their balls and penises and then give brief blow jobs, though not to climax. Most men prefer to orgasm during intercourse, so the women don't go all out during foreplay lest he come too soon. For instance, Giselle, a 30-year-old white party animal, mentioned that a client once ejaculated after only two minutes of oral play. He felt that this was somehow unfair, so he only gave her R200. Giselle got upset, though, because it wasn't her fault he couldn't hold back his orgasm. According to the women, if a guy squirts, she's completed the contract. If he wants to squirt again, he has to pay again.

But what about the women? Do they get to have any fun? Some men do try to give them a good time too. The Filipinos are renowned for focusing on the sugar girls' joy, especially through cunnilingus. They say they enjoy 'going down' on the women. This not only gives the men egotistical satisfaction, but it makes the sex seem more authentic to them. They reckon that if they've taken the time to massage and stimulate their partners, then the women are more than just hookers – they're lovers. And the sex was more than just a commercial transaction – it was making love.

Caitlin the veteran agrees. She said that the first time she had an orgasm was through oral sex with a Filipino. She had never experienced it before. Since then, she's allowed herself to enjoy the sex on some occasions.

The Main Course

All the women insist that after playtime they always make their clients wear condoms for sex. We should be sceptical of this claim. The frequency of pregnancy, disease contraction and fearful visits to the clinics (and avoidance of them) suggests that the women don't always protect themselves. For instance, they're often drunk or high when they commence coupling, so they don't always process the situation with their full faculties. In addition, men will generally pay higher fees for flesh-on-flesh sex, which is a big temptation for any prostitute. Moreover, the women sometimes reward repeat clients with full-contact sex so that they will seek them out again on future visits. Finally, if

the ladies feel emotionally close to a guy or want to create a sense of intimacy, then they sometimes relax the condom rule.

But with or without protection, most women say that their Asian clients are conventional lovers: they typically assume the missionary position, poke around a while, get some momentum, hit the point of no return, release and then sleep. Younger guys also like having the woman on top. And some men do ask for anal sex, though they don't demand it.

Once a guy has started intercourse, the woman usually puts on a show for his benefit. She pretends that he's the best lover she's ever had, acting as if she cannot contain herself because he's so amazing. She moans, groans, writhes and bucks to make him feel that she is into him. The charade is calculated purely to get him off more quickly.

When the seaman ejaculates, it marks the end of their business relationship. Contractually, he's gotten what he's paid for and she's released of any further obligations: the deal is done. Some men try their luck, of course, asking for two-for-one specials. They sometimes assume they have access to the woman's body for the whole night, no matter if they come or not. But this isn't always so. The women usually demand a cash payment for each orgasm. One reason they do this is because the amount of work necessary for the second climax is much greater than for the first, so they want compensation.

Getting Laid and Paid

Sometimes the women collect their payment from the men after the job is done, but most prefer to collect it beforehand. All of them have been taken advantage of by tricky seamen who've reneged on the fee, so they usually claim the money upfront.

But no matter how much money they get, the post-coital moment is a great time to pad their *poesgeld* by stealing from their marks. Many of the guys fall asleep soon after sex, which gives the girls a golden opportunity to dip into their wallets. It's one of the few times they have unhindered access to a man's cash, so they don't want to lose their chance. After all, they never know when the next contract will come along.

Duds or Dynamos?

One evening, as I was going into Club Shanghaied, I bumped into 21-year-old Bee. I mentioned that I hadn't seen her in a long time because she seemed to be so busy with clients. She smiled and said, 'Yeah, I've had too many guys this week. Tonight I want to take a break. I've got to give my pussy a rest.' Presumably, Bee was satisfying her customers because they kept coming back for more. But this raises an interesting question: How good are the sugar girls at their job? Are they sexual duds or dynamos?

No doubt sexual gratification lies in the thighs of the beholder, but according to an older white man, a regular at the Riviera, 'Sex with the younger girls is actually quite dissatisfying because they're so economical with their bodies. They just want to get you off and collect their fee, the little mercenaries. You see, they think it's all about their looks, so they don't even try. But the older ones, like her' – pointing at a mature woman at the end of the bar – 'they know they don't have the looks, so they really work it in the bedroom. She takes her time. And nothing's off limits – nothing.' This comment hints at the idea that there are structural factors impacting on the quality of sex with sugar girls.

Many seamen are initially drawn to a sugar girl based on her beauty, especially in Durban where time is short. At a biological level, attractiveness and youth send all kinds of mating signals to men, who, according to the sexperts, subconsciously see them as signs of fertility and health. Consciously, however, we know that beauty is no indicator of skill at all. In fact, as the regular at the Riviera suggests, it may inhibit pretty prostitutes from learning new tricks because they understand that they're valued for their looks, not their bedroom abilities. Older women who lack the kiss of youth, however, may try to compensate through superior sexual skills.

The skills I'm talking about revolve around technique, which includes bodily movements, such as touching, holding, gripping, squeezing and bucking, combined with an insightful understanding of timing and anatomy. These technical abilities are often the result of experience, but they also seem to be a function of personality and interest. Just

as experienced sugar girls can be poor technicians because of a total lack of interest in the pleasure of their clients (think Sandy Kat, the thieving dock rat), young inexperienced women can prove excellent with mechanics because of their spunk, curiosity and interest (like Bee). But generally the women want to bring their clients to climax as soon as possible, so they're likely to develop the necessary techniques for getting the job done quickly.

Indeed, if there's anything that prostitutes gain over time, it's experience. They learn what works with different nationalities, accumulating a fund of knowledge that can be spent on any encounter. This would presumably make them good lovers, at least in a mechanical and performative sense. If sexual skill can be measured, then these prostitutes would probably score pretty high – especially the older ones.

But what about emotional connection? As it turns out, when a woman exhibits emotional feelings towards a client, the man takes it like an aphrodisiac. His ego soars when he knows that the lady is into him. The men admit as much, saying that they enjoy the sex more in these circumstances. So for engagements where real emotions are involved, the sex tends to be good, even if the technique is mediocre. But most prostitutes are keen to protect themselves from the emotional turmoil of their work, so if a woman offers such a connection to a client, then she is likely to think he's pretty special.

The price of the sexual contract can influence sexual joy as well, depending on the client. Some men are bargain hunters who want the cheapest sex possible. Others assume that good sex costs good money, so they like to go with women who present themselves in a high-class fashion.

Regarding duration, the longer is typically the better for the client, but sugar girls understand the law of diminishing returns. After a certain point, every hour with a client yields less money per unit of time. So they usually seek to finish the job and collect their fees as quickly as possible. Yet there's nothing more likely to turn a man off than to feel that his woman is in a rush to be done with him.

Lastly, sugar girls project themselves onto their clients' imagination through their behaviour at the clubs. Men are attracted to different sorts, so their pleasure will be affected by their perception of a woman's

character. As some men get off on the idea that they're sleeping with coy maidens, the younger women can play up their inexperience by acting bashfully or demurely. Other men crave being handled by a 'seasoned whore' who exudes experience and knowledge.

Of the factors listed above, only two – experience and emotion – stand out as making a consistent difference as to whether a client enjoys the sex or not; the others depend on the specific encounter. Prostitutes may boast plenty of experience, which probably bodes well for most encounters, but they lack the emotional connection that couples usually take for granted in normal relationships, which presumably lessens the quality of the engagement. So, similar to most sexual encounters that people have outside of prostitution, it's a mixed bag. There are exciting and not-so-exciting aspects of the deal.

However, two issues can make all these subtle factors irrelevant: intense sexual hunger and drunkenness. After months at sea, many sailors don't care much about how experienced, good-looking or technically gifted a prostitute is – he only cares that she's available. A similar logic applies if he's drunk.

No Kinky Stuff?

While prostitutes' behaviour can excite their clients' imagination, most dockside encounters never go beyond that to the realm of fantasy, such as playing roles, wearing costumes, engaging in S&M or using artificial devices. Those sorts of situations are usually found in other prostitution sectors – streetwalking, brothels, escort agencies – whose clientele is dominated by local and international whites, many of whom seek out sex workers to make their wildest fantasies come true. In contrast, seafarers tend to stay within conventional sexual boundaries when they're with their sugar girls.