

Narratives of sex work: Exploring stories of entry, experience, and meaning

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This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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ABSTRACT

Research into the reasons why sex workers enter and stay in sex work has largely viewed entry from perspectives of either choice or constraint. Choice perspectives attribute entry to reasons such as female agency and empowerment, and social and financial independence, while constraint perspectives attribute entry to reasons such as economic necessity, drug and alcohol abuse, childhood sexual abuse, lack of education and job opportunity, and homelessness and truancy. Such dichotomous thinking has been criticized by ‘third wave feminism’ which maintains that choice/constraint perspectives do not coincide with the reality of women’s lives, moreover, that the studies advocating such views have based their theory on quantitative findings and have neglected to hear from sex workers themselves. The study sought to explore how 14 street-based sex workers framed their presence within the sex work industry. It employed a qualitative narrative approach to exploring the stories sex workers told about their entry into sex work, their experiences within the industry, and the meanings they made of these experiences. The exploration and analysis of narrative accounts were instructed by thematic narrative analysis, which developed a number of themes shared under the umbrellas of context, experiences, and meaning. Entry and continuation in sex work were largely constructed from perspectives of constraint, where participants communicated a dislike and dissatisfaction in their work and presence within the industry. However, while an overt choice to pursue sex work as a desirable vocation was not commonly reported, participants communicated a sense of agency and choice in the decisions they made to better their circumstances through entering sex work, and the mechanisms they utilised to make meaning of their experiences and cope in their work. The findings suggest that it is largely simplistic to view entry and continuation in sex work from perspectives communicated by either choice/constraint paradigms alone and argue for the necessity to explore the social and cultural contexts informing the reported realities of sex workers in South Africa.

Key words: Sex work; sex workers; narratives; entry; experiences; meaning.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The project was born in the anticipation of 2010 and the Soccer World Cup to be held in South Africa, in a context characterised by a large amount of public speculation as to whether sex workⁱ as an illegal activity should be legalised and/or decriminalised in South Africaⁱⁱ. While arguments supporting the criminalisation and legalisation/decriminalisation of sex work have been proposed and disputed for many years in South Africa, the prospect of the World Cup brought what was previously a more academic debate into the public arena, when the view that, “Prostitution needs to be legalised in South Africa ahead of the several hundred thousand football fans expected to arrive for the 2010 Fifa World Cup” (Mbanjwa, 2007, para. 1), was proposed. With the predicted influx of foreigners to South Africa, the criminalisation/decriminalisation debate became all the more fervent, as part of it centred on the temporary decriminalisation and legalisation of sex work and provision of sexual services to foreign clients during the duration of the Soccer World Cup. The suggestion to legalise sex work ahead of 2010 was first proposed in 2007 by former police commissioner Jackie Selebi, who was quoted saying that sex work ought to be legalised as a “special dispensation” for the duration of the Soccer World Cup (Makgetla, 2007, p. 63). Moreover, it was also suggested by George Lekgetho, a parliament member of the African National Congress (ANC) that “If sex working is legalised people would not do things in the dark. That would bring us tax and would improve the lives of those who are not working” (South African Press Association, cited by Agbiboa, 2010, para. 2). It was also proposed that through legalising sex work, more serious crimes could be given full police attention over the course of the Soccer World Cup.

The suggestion to legalise sex work ahead of 2010 was met with public concerns about the compromising nature of the “country’s morals” (a view communicated by the National Prosecution Authority head, Mokotedi Mphe, cited by Harper, 2009, para. 1), the spread of HIV and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), and the propagation of other criminal activities, particularly human trafficking (Agbiboa, 2010). These concerns lent both to the desire for the continued criminalisation of sex work by some (in order to maintain the country’s morals, prevent an attitude of tolerance towards sex work, prevent the spread of HIV and STIs that increased sexual activity may invite, and the propagation of crime associated with sex work, for example), and the desire for the legalisation and/or decriminalisation of sex work by others (in order to allow sex workers the ability to seek health services without shame, report incidences of violence to the police, and reduce the

stigma associated with sex work, for example). Feminist advocates and sex worker organisations were at the forefront of arguments campaigning for not only the decriminalisation of sex work, but also for the provision of services aimed at caring and providing the necessary health care for individuals working within the sex industry. Some of these views will be explored in more detail during the course of the study.

This frames the context in which the current study took form, which did not seek to draw conclusions about whether sex work ought to be criminalised, legalised or decriminalised, but to re-examine sex work in terms of the ways in which sex workers perceived their work, as outlined in the chapters that follow. The speculation characterising the build-up to the 2010 World Cup called into question the feasibility of criminalising the sex worker at all, and has consequently demanded a re-examination of sex work as a profession.

1.1. Rationale

While most feminist views agree that criminalisation is not an appropriate response to sex work (e.g. Jolin, 1994; Pyett & Warr, 1999), asserting that it achieves neither the cessation nor prevention of sex work and prevents sex workers from reporting incidents of violence because of the illegality of the work, there are a number of diverse perspectives regarding how sex work is perceived and ought to be interpreted and dealt with (Krüger, 2004). Gardner (2009) asserts that arguments regarding the criminalisation/decriminalisation of sex work are largely informed by the ways in which sex work is perceived and defined (as exploitative or a form of work) and the reasons surrounding an individual's entry into the industry. Reasons for entry into sex work have varied from theories of childhood sexual abuse (James & Meyerding, 1977; Silbert & Pines, 1981, 1983), early homelessness and truancy (Seng, 1989; Simons & Whitbeck, 1991), lack of employment and education opportunities (Fick, 2005; Gardner, 2009; Gysels, Pool & Nnalusiba, 2002; Stadler & Delany, 2006; SWEAT, 2005), a means of achieving "financial and social independence" (Fick, 2005; Gysels et al., 2002, p. 180; Lucas, 2005) financing drug and alcohol addiction (Leggett, 1999, 2001; Maher, 1997; Pyett & Warr, 1999; Stadler & Delany, 2006; Yahne, Miller, Irvin-Vitela & Tonigan, 2002), the result of urbanisation and immigrants' hopes of a 'better life' (Leggett, 1999, 2001; Lucas, 2005; Stadler & Delany, 2006), and the need to support dependants (Chudakov, Ilan, Belmaker & Cwikel, 2002; Gilfus, 2006; Gould & Fick, 2008; Leggett, 1999). These perspectives can be grouped into primarily two camps, which Chandler (1999) refers to as 'choice' and 'constraint' perspectives, Wahab (2003) as

‘exploitative’ or ‘liberating’ perspectives, and Maher (1997) as perspectives of ‘victimization’ or ‘volition’.

According to choice feminism, sex workers exercise their own agency and freedom in deciding to enter the sex work industry. They receive economic equality with men in a predominantly male-dominated economy and in selling sexual services they are allowed the economic freedom and security that have not been available to them in the past (Chandler, 1999; Krüger, 2004). Constraint perspectives, on the other hand, view entry into sex work as the result of factors of constraint, impinged on women by patriarchy (Chandler, 1999). They argue that women are led into sex work due to reasons such as unemployment, child abuse, and drug use, due to the patriarchal and capitalist nature of society and the gender inequalities present between men and women.

1.1.1. The constraints of choice/constraint perspectives

Contemporary debates on adult female sex work largely revolve around a polarized argument that constructs sex work as either exploitative or liberating and sex workers as coerced victims or empowered whores.

(Wahab, 2003, p. 627)

Choice perspectives have been criticized for portraying women as “rational, volitional agents seeking to maximize ‘deviant’ or ‘criminal’ opportunities in a brave new world devoid of structure, power, and domination” (Maher, 1997, p. 1), as well as viewing law-breaking behaviour such as drug use and sex work as emancipatory to women (Borgois, 1989, 1995; Borgois & Dunlap, 1993; Wilson, 1993; all cited in Maher, 1997). Female participation in law-breaking activity does not necessarily infer that power balances between men and women are equal, as is maintained by a number of choice texts. In her study of the lives of drug-using sex workers in Brooklyn, Maher (1997) found that women were neither passive victims nor volitional agents exercising control and power. Maher (1997, p. 19) notes,

...while their narratives contain many of the predictable tropes of poverty, racism, sexism, and violence, these women emerge from their potential victimhood as creative and resilient actors struggling to confront, challenge, and continually re-make the structures that constrain them.

Choice perspectives often use the lawbreaking activity of women as evidence of female agency and empowered participation in a traditionally male-dominated economy. While Maher (1997) recognises an active agency exercised by these women, she asserts that their experiences do not testify to the assumption that participation in the drug economy has equalised employment opportunities between men and women.

It is argued that constraint perspectives, on the other hand, such as those that maintain that drug dependence is responsible for women's participation in the sex work industry (as a precipitating or maintaining factor), deny women the agency of being allowed to exercise choice and control in deciding their means of generating an income (Maher, 1997). These perspectives often view the pimp and/or drug dealer as the same, maintaining that drug dealers encourage women to take drugs and then to enter sex work as a means of supporting their habit (Maher, 1997). Maher (1997) maintains that such perspectives do not make allowance for women's agency and resilience in exercising control over their bodies and lives; rather, they view them as perpetually subjected to the control and domination of men.

1.1.2. Towards an intersection of choice and constraint perspectives

Both readings are guilty of over-simplification and both ignore the relationships between broader social, economic, and cultural formations and immediate, specific and local contexts in structuring the conditions by which women's agency is enacted.

(Maher, 1997, p. 1)

Both Maher (1997) and Chandler (1999) question whether such perspectives are representative and helpful in portraying the reality of women's lives: "the first (perspective) practically denies women any agency and the second over-endows them with it" (Maher, 1997, p. 1). Women are perceived to be either passive subjects to the power of gender inequalities, or active perpetrators of criminal behaviour. Both perspectives are accused of over-simplifying the reality of women's lives in ignoring the wide range of social, economic and political contexts in which women exercise choice or constraint in sex work (Chandler, 1999; Krüger, 2004; Maher, 1997). African feminists and other groups have similarly accused feminism of being "discriminatory" in "reflect(ing) only the views of upper class white women" (Krüger, 2004, p. 140; Chandler, 1999), through neglecting to explore the complexities of women's lives that are not contained in choice/constraint dichotomies.

For this reason, ‘third wave feminism’, that is, feminism that believes that there is ‘choice within constraint’ (Chandler, 1999), has emerged as a means of avoiding the short-comings of either choice or constraint perspectives and the criticism they invite by African feminists and other groups. Chandler (1999, p. 17) argues that in order for a discourse of both choice and constraint to be adopted, “it may be necessary for feminists to completely remove their focus away from female freedom or limitation, and to move towards asking what can be done to reduce or alter conditions within which people experience oppression”. Maher (1997) similarly asserts that future research should attempt to explore this intersection of duality in order to avoid falling into the mistake of perceiving the sex worker as either victim or ‘volitional agent’. The lives and experiences of sex workers are driven by a number of factors that lie outside victim/volition dichotomies (Chudakov et al., 2002; Maher, 1997), and may be best explored through looking at the social, economic and cultural contexts of sex workers, communicated by their stories of how they came to be involved in sex work, and the experiences and meanings they have made working within the industry.

This study therefore focuses on how street-based sex workers frame their presence in the sex work industry. It asks how topics of entry into sex work, experiences in sex work, and the meaning of sex work, are narrated and perceived by sex workers in light of the choice/constraint paradigms outlined in this study, and whether such paradigms are realistic and representative of the lives and experiences of street-based sex workers in South Africa.

The following chapter will provide an overview of the literature pertaining to sex work, and in particular, of the literature exploring the contexts under which individuals enter sex work, experience working, and make meaning of their experiences, in order to gain a better understanding of sex work in the context of debate in South Africa. Chapter three will provide details of the study’s design and research methodology; chapter four, an analysis and discussion of narratives of sex work; and chapter five, the conclusions and recommendations of this study.

CHAPTER 2: A REVIEW OF SEX WORK LITERATURE

Through reviewing contemporary literature on sex work, it would appear that research has centred largely on studies relating to issues such as the sexual and reproductive health of sex workers (see Barnard, 1993; Campbell, Mzaidume, & Williams, 1998; Fick, 2005; Gysels et al., 2002; Leggett, 1998, 1999, 2001; Pyett & Warr, 1999; Stadler & Delaney, 2006; Wojcicki & Malala, 2001), experiences of stigmatization and violence, and strategies for coping (see Fick, 2005; Gysels et al., 2002; Hartley, 2005; Maher, 1997; Pyett & Warr, 1999), traffickingⁱⁱⁱ (Gould & Fick, 2008; Molo Songololo, 2000), and literature exploring both constraint and choice antecedents to sex work, such as childhood sexual and physical abuse (James & Meyerding, 1977; Seng, 1989; Silbert & Pines, 1981, 1983; Simons & Whitbeck, 1991), drug use and poverty (Gysels et al., 2002; Leggett, 1999, 2001; Maher, 1997), and expressions of female agency and empowerment (Fick, 2005; Lopez-Jones, 1998, cited in Lucas, 2005; Lucas, 2005) respectively. Studies relating to the reasons why individuals enter sex work have largely neglected to explore the perceptions of sex work from sex workers themselves, and discussion around the reasons as to why individuals enter and continue in sex work has tended to polarise the argument into one that views their presence in the sex work industry from out of choice or constraint alone. An overview of the literature pertaining to sex work will be provided in order to introduce readers to the topics explored by research and the studies relating to the perceptions sex workers have about their entry into, and experiences within, sex work.

2.1. Sexual and reproductive health

Studies relating to the sexual and reproductive health of sex workers have argued that due to the illegal nature of sex work, sex workers are unable to seek adequate services to protect themselves from HIV/AIDS and other STIs (Leggett, 1998; Stadler & Delany, 2006). For this reason, authors such as Stadler and Delaney (2006) propose the implementation of necessary health facilities in the South African brothel context so that sex workers will be more able to seek medical attention and prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. This would be achieved through a form of legalising sex work so that it could be monitored better. Moreover, authors such as Leggett (1998) promote decriminalisation above legalisation of sex work in South Africa so that areas of sex work that feel too restricted by legalisation do not need to go underground and remain unmonitored and difficult to reach for purposes of education.

Other studies have explored the circumstances under which sex workers are at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and other STIs. In their study into the survival strategies utilised by sex workers in Australia, Pyett and Warr (1999) found that more vulnerable groups of sex workers, such as street-based sex workers, were at the highest risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and other STIs because they did not have the same protective factors offered to them that less vulnerable groups of sex workers did. Individuals working in brothels were able to exercise more control and power over sexual encounters than street-based or massage parlour sex workers because they were more able to demand condom usage from clients (brothels often make condom usage standard policy), were more protected from violent clients (having the protection of brothel owners and the security of working in an organised setting), and were provided the physical shelter of the brothel. Authors have also argued that individuals who have a greater self-esteem and sense of self-worth will be more equipped to demand condom usage from clients and assert themselves in the sexual encounter (Fick, 2005; Hartley, 2005; Pyett & Warr, 1999). They thus argue for the decriminalisation of sex work so that individuals will not feel ashamed to identify themselves as sex workers and seek the treatment and preventative measures necessary for their sexual and reproductive health.

Still other studies, such as Wojcicki and Malala (2001), have looked at the factors influencing sexual decision-making processes and their association with increased risk-taking behaviour exercised by sex workers in South Africa. They explore the power relations present between sex workers and their clients, and the ways in which sex workers exercise agency and maintain control by making logistical decisions about the sex work encounter and whether they will engage in more risky sexual exchanges in order to earn more money. They propose a reworking of the way in which the sex worker is perceived: from a woman who is seen as a victim to a woman exercising, albeit small degrees, of agency in bettering her circumstances.

2.2. Experiences of stigmatization and violence, and strategies for coping

Authors such as Fick (2005), Hartley (2005) and Pyett and Warr (1999) have looked at sex workers' experiences of stigmatization and violence. Sex workers often experience violence and stigmatization exercised by the hands of clients, pimps and police. In reporting instances of abuse and rape, sex workers are rarely taken seriously due to the illegality of their work and the perception that clients reserve the right to sexually abuse those whom they pay for sex (Fick, 2005; Hartley, 2005; Pyett & Warr, 1999). Studies have explored the ways in which sex workers cope both physically and psychologically with the stigmatization and

violence experienced in their work (Maher, 1997; Stadler & Delaney, 2006). Some studies have, for example, looked at the ways in which sex workers speak about the 'self'. Research has indicated that sex workers often create a distance between their 'self' and their 'working self' as a means of keeping their self-concept separate from the work they do (Maher, 1997), as well as "reworking the concept of respectability" (Campbell, 1999, cited in Wojcicki & Malala, 2001, p. 102) in order to maintain a certain respectability about their conduct.

Studies exploring the physical strategies sex workers employ in protecting themselves from violence have demonstrated that older, more experienced sex workers engaging in commercial forms of sex work are more able to protect themselves from violent clients and the possibility of contracting HIV/AIDS and STIs than younger, less-experienced individuals working on the streets (Pyett & Warr, 1999). This is because older, more experienced sex workers have learnt how to avoid potentially violent clients and encounters with the police, demand condom usage from clients, and take control of the sexual encounter and the services they will or will not provide (Fick, 2005; Lucas, 2005; Maher, 1997). They argue that a sex worker's ability to assert herself and maintain control is also dependent on her attitude towards sex work and the circumstances under which she is working.

2.3. Reasons for entry: choice or constraint?

In addition to literature that explores topics such as the sexual and reproductive health of sex workers, and sex workers' experiences of stigmatization and violence and their strategies for coping, there is a large body of literature that explores the antecedents for entry into sex work. As previously outlined, antecedents for entry into sex work have been grouped into those of constraint (such as due to childhood sexual and physical abuse and drug use), and those of choice (such as expressions of female agency and empowerment), and are explored in greater detail below.

2.3.1. Childhood sexual and physical abuse

Studies have maintained that children exposed to sexual and/or physical abuse are likely to have integrated early sexual experiences into their self-concepts and pursued sex work as a means of realising that self-concept (Chesney-Lind & Rodriguez, 1983; James & Meyerding, 1977; Silbert & Pines, 1981). According to a study by Silbert and Pines (1981, p. 408) that quantitatively explored "the antecedents to prostitution, and the long term impacts of sexual child abuse" amongst female sex workers in San Francisco (USA), 70% of the women in

their sample who had experienced child sexual abuse reported that their experiences had influenced their decision to enter sex work. Similarly, Potter, Martin and Romans (1999, p. 935), in a quantitative study exploring the “early developmental experiences of female sex workers” in New Zealand, found that sex workers were more likely to have experienced parental separation, less caring parents, higher degrees of childhood sexual abuse, economic strain, truancy, and incomplete education whilst growing up than the control group. They found that 80% of their sample reported having experienced at least one instance of physical abuse before the age of 16. Thirty-six percent reported having experienced non-penetrative genital sexual abuse, while 32% and 25% reported having experienced attempted penetrative and actual penetrative sexual abuse before the age of 16 respectively. However, authors have also asserted that child sexual abuse does not inevitably lead individuals to enter sex work (Seng, 1989; Silbert & Pines, 1981). Seng (1989) found that running away from home was an important intervening variable, and asserted that running away from home was more influential than child sexual abuse as an antecedent to an individual’s entry into sex work.

2.3.2. Drug use

Some studies, such as Maher’s (1997, p. 1) qualitative study into the lifestyles, power, and gender relations of sex workers working in a “Brooklyn drug market”, indicate that there is a relationship between drug use and sex work, arguing that many sex workers are led into sex work because of their drug addiction, and use drugs in order to cope with the emotional stresses of their work (Maher, 1997). Other studies (e.g. Leggett, 2001) have contested the postulated relationship between drug addiction and sex work. In South Africa, Leggett (2001) found that ‘race’^{iv} served as an important intervening factor influencing the relationship between drug use and sex work. He found that white sex workers living in the city, earning a high income and having a large clientele, reported high levels of drug use while poorer black women working in more remote areas did not. He also found that higher-earning coloured and Indian women working in the city reported high levels of drug use, while those living in more remote areas did not. This testified to the importance of ‘race’ and demography in determining the association between sex work and drug use.

2.3.3. Expressions of female agency and empowerment

In contrast to the constraint antecedents of entry into sex work are antecedents of choice, which in their acute form hold the view that women enter sex work as a means of expressing female agency and empowerment. While the need to make money is generally accepted as

the main motivation for entry into sex work (see Gysels et al., 2002; Maher, 1997; Pyett & Warr, 1999; Stadler & Delany, 2006), various authors have maintained that sex work is not necessarily consistent with poverty, as both middle-class and impoverished women have entered and stayed in sex work (Boggs & Vernon, 1991 cited in Mackay, 1997). This has been explained by theories maintaining that sex work provides the middle-class woman with perceived acceptance and emotional fulfilment (Mackay, 1997), to theories arguing that middle-class women enter sex work as a means of making a powerful political statement with regard to the agency they have over their bodies (Lucas, 2005). Such perspectives are often viewed to be those associated with choice feminism, which asserts that sex work is chosen by women as a means of expressing female agency and empowerment, and communicates a political statement through challenging the cultural and gendered roles women normatively fulfil in society (Gysels et al., 2002; Lucas, 2005).

In her study, Lucas (2005) explored the experiences and motivations of 30 female indoor sex workers regarding their perceptions of sex work as a form of paid work in America. She identified a tripartite differentiation between sex workers who saw their work as a means of meeting immediate expenses, those who were more committed to their work and systematic in the degree to which they worked, and those who saw sex work as a business that could be expanded and invested in. She found that sex workers reported their work to be better than other forms of work that women were typically involved in as they were less likely to experience sexual harassment in their work and were more able to resist it than they had been able to in other forms of work. They felt that the ability to set boundaries such as the types of sexual services they would provide, how much they would charge, and which clients they would see, gave them a sense of power and control that they did not experience in the past. Entering sex work also gave some individuals a sense of power that they had not experienced in past abusive relationships, as charging a fee for sexual services and exercising authority over the sexual encounter helped them to regain a sense of control and power that past abusive relationships had not allowed. Satisfaction and enjoyment of sex work was related to the financial benefits of the work and the feelings of power and control individuals felt when they charged men for sex and asserted control over the logistics of the sex work encounter.

2.4. The intersection of choice and constraint

Having explored the literature on the constraint and choice antecedents of entry into sex work, it would appear that no study supports the claims of either choice or constraint

perspectives in their entirety. For this reason we can assume that factors of both choice and constraint influence an individual's entry and continuation in sex work, moreover, that such perspectives taken in isolation of each other are simplistic in their understanding of the complex realities of women's experiences and are therefore inadequate theoretical models. Illustrations of the intersections of choice and constraint can be seen in studies conducted by Chudakov et al. (2002), Gysels et al. (2002), and Wojcicki and Malala (2001). In similar studies, Chudakov et al. (2002) and Gysels et al. (2002) identify and explore the different "profiles" of sex workers' backgrounds and perceptions of their work. Chudakov et al. (2002, p. 305), in interviewing 55 female brothel-based sex workers in Israel in order to explore the "motivation and mental health of sex workers", developed five main profiles or "prototypes" (Chudakov et al., 2002, p. 308) of sex workers, based on their individual case histories. The profiles described individuals who entered sex work voluntarily and were satisfied with their work, seeing it as an opportunity to make money and afford less pressing expenses, to individuals who were not satisfied with their work as they felt that they had little control over their lives and felt economically constrained to continue. Incidences of trauma experienced before entry or whilst working within the industry were reported amongst participants and typically resulted in individuals feeling unsatisfied with their work and not in control of their lives. The authors described a greater number of individuals who were represented by profiles of work dissatisfaction and constraint than those of work satisfaction and choice.

Gysels et al. (2002) looked at the life histories of 34 women who engaged in sex work in a Ugandan trading town in order to investigate the contexts under which they entered sex work, their ability to protect themselves from risk, and the circumstances under which they would have economic success. They found a similar form of categorisation to that of Chudakov et al. (2002). Individuals working from the "back-street bars" (Gysels et al., 2002, p. 190) were economically constrained to stay in sex work because they did not have the necessary education and skills to find alternative work. The women who worked as waitresses in the more popular bars were often associated with pimps and, because of the more commercial nature of the work and the better income, were found to enjoy their work. Finally, women who owned bars and both controlled and participated in sex work, felt more able to assert control over the sex work encounter and their financial independence, and were consequently satisfied with their work.

Based on the review of these two studies, it would appear that an individual's enjoyment of her work was largely dependent on whether she felt she had exercised choice in entering and remaining in sex work and the degree to which she was economically constrained to stay in sex work. It was also related to whether she had experienced trauma before she entered sex work and/or while she worked, and the degree to which she felt she had control over her life.

Intersections of choice and constraint were also seen in a study by Wojcicki and Malala (2001), which explored the factors that influence sexual-decision making amongst female sex workers in the Hillbrow/Joubert Park/Berea areas in Johannesburg. The authors found that while sex workers framed their presence in the industry from a place of constraint, they spoke about micro levels of choice they exerted in the negotiated sexual encounter between themselves and their clients. These levels of choice manifested themselves in the micro decisions sex workers made in relation to how much they would charge clients for sex and whether they would agree to unsafe sex if a high enough price was offered, and these decisions, albeit micro, were recognised by the authors as being instrumental in recognising a degree of agency and control in the decisions of sex workers. Wojcicki and Malala (2001, p. 101) did therefore not see the sex worker as a "victim of her circumstances", but rather viewed her choices as those necessary for difficult circumstances.

Choice and constraint then, intersected not only on a categorical level amongst individuals, as illustrated in the studies by Chudakov et al. (2002) and Gysels et al. (2002), but also within individuals, as illustrated by Wojcicki and Malala (2001). Different categories of sex workers (outlined in the former studies) perceived their work differently: for individuals who felt they had entered sex work due to reasons of constraint and were constrained to continue working, sex work was not seen as an enjoyable vocational experience; for individuals who felt they had exercised choice in entering sex work and felt they were in control of their circumstances, sex work was seen as a satisfactory and even enjoyable and lucrative business. Yet choice and constraint also intersected on a more intrinsic level within the individual, as illustrated by the latter study cited above. Individuals grappled with constraint through exercising micro decisions of choice: while individuals may have felt constrained in entering and continuing in sex work, or in their experiences of a lack of control in particular sex work encounters, they exercised choice in the micro logistical decisions they made and the way in which they interpreted and made sense of these constraints. Wojcicki and Malala's (2001) study illustrates the complexity of sex worker's lives and the decisions they make in order to

grapple with decisions and feelings of choice and constraint respectively. Their study points to the theoretical simplicity of adopting a choice versus constraint conceptualisation of entry into and continuation in sex work, and calls for a re-examination and interpretation of the lives of women as they are shaped by the contexts and intersections of choice and constraint in South Africa and sex work respectively.

2.5. A call to explore the contextual realities of sex workers' lives in South Africa

A review of the literature demonstrates the large range of topics that have been explored and studied in sex work. While the literature on sex work continues to grow, research invested in exploring the motivating factors behind entry into sex work has typically neglected to include the experiences and opinions of sex workers themselves and the contextual factors motivating their entry into sex work. It is clear from the studies reviewed that instances of both choice and constraint are found to be present in the experiences of sex workers, with various factors influencing a sex worker's attitude towards her work. While there is a small body of research that has looked at how indoor sex workers perceive and understand their work and the particular motivations leading them to sex work, there is even less research that looks at how street-based sex workers perceive and understand their work, particularly whether intersections of choice and constraint coincide with the reality of street-based sex workers' lives in South Africa. It is important to add here that a number of the studies cited in this review have been conducted in 'westernized' contexts and are therefore questionable in their representation and understanding of the lives and perceptions of sex workers in the South African context. There is a need to explore the motivations, experiences, and perceptions of sex workers as they are communicated by street-based sex workers in the South African context.

This study thus explores the narratives of 14 street-based sex workers in order to investigate the types of stories or narratives sex workers tell about how they came to be involved in sex work, exploring specifically, the *contexts* under which they entered, their *experiences* within the industry, and the *meanings* they made of these experiences, and for this reason, a narrative analysis was chosen as a complementary analytic approach. In this thesis I adopt Chandler's (1999) critical analysis of the feminist debates surrounding sex work. Rather than conceptualising sex work in terms of dichotomous choice/constraint perspectives, I sought to explore the intersections of choice and constraint as they were demonstrated in the narratives of street-based sex workers. The following chapter will introduce the concept of narrative,

provide a background as to why narrative analysis was chosen, explore the benefits and burdens of using the analysis, and contextualize the analysis to the case of the individual interviews.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Design

A qualitative research design is most suited to the questions posed in the current study. According to Porter (1995) (as cited in Oakley, 1998, p. 721):

The growth of abstract numerical calculations is a feature of an increasingly complex society; numbers can serve as a technology of moral and social distance. It has been suggested that this is one reason why surveys became the preferred vehicle for studying the insane, the unemployed, factory workers, prostitutes and cholera victims.

A qualitative research design will seek to bridge the gap between a marginalised group (i.e. sex workers) and 'normative' society, through obtaining information that does not seek to create 'moral and social distance' between the researcher and those who are being researched. Feminist theorists are particularly critical of the hierarchical interchange that occurs between the individual(s) researching (the "knower" or "expert") and the individual(s) who are researched (the "known") (Oakley, 1998, p. 710). They argue that studying individuals from a distance avoids the discomfort of engaging with participants and stepping into their worlds in trying to understand their realities, and for this reason ought to be criticized (Elshtain, 1981; Reinharz, 1984). It is important for the researcher to engage with the individuals whom she 'studies' as "one cannot survey the human race from a great and learned distance, proclaiming loudly that one has found the truth for the good of all the nameless, faceless abstractions one has never really bothered to take seriously" (Elshtain, 1981, p. 303). A qualitative design serves to equalise the researcher/'subject' relationship and also allows the participant the ability to exercise control in deciding which information she wishes to bring to the research interview. This is not to assert that quantitative means of gathering information are always distant and disengaging, it simply proposes that the qualitative means of gathering information and allowing the participants the opportunity to voice their experiences is more suitable to the topic at hand.

3.1.1. Introducing the concept of the narrative

'Narrative' has been defined by various authors as: a type of story with a chronological sequence of action or events, arranged with a beginning, middle and end (Esterberg, 2002); a tale whose narrator selects, organises and evaluates events within a temporal and spatial

ordering (Riessman, 2008); and a “performance of the self as a story of identity” (Freeman, 1993; Parker, 2005 p. 71). While most authors have agreed that ‘narrative’ is a pervasive term, often used as a metaphor for just about any written and oral text (Murray, 2003; Riessman, 2008), they highlight a number of features that distinguish it from other literary genres. Murray (2003, p. 98) distinguishes narrative from other forms of text or discourse because it typically creates a “coherent causal account” of past or future events, whilst acknowledging that narration may differ from narrator to narrator. It has also been argued that narrative seeks to provide order and meaning through the structuring and plotting of events and the integration of ideas through the telling of stories about the self, others, and the world (K.J. Gergen & M.M. Gergen, 1984; Ochs & Capps, 1996). Narrating serves to bring meaning to personal experience as it is integrated with broader social and cultural values and frameworks that are significant to the individual (Morawski, 1997, cited in Murray, 2003).

3.1.2. Towards narrative research

Narrative psychology emerged during the 1960s when humanist views of the individual contested the way traditional studies in psychology saw individuals as fixed, unchanging beings (Parker, 2005). It asserted that identity and agency were constructed and acted out according to the cultural resources and personal experiences impacting an individual’s identity. Narrative psychology thus concerns itself with the structure, function and content of stories, and looks at how these stories are shaped and exchanged in order to bring identity and significance to the individual (Murray, 2003). It seeks to help individuals explore and redefine personal narratives that have been socially and/or culturally scripted and incorporate new, and often painful experiences, into their life narrative.

Narrative research, a tool of narrative psychology and other disciplines within the social sciences, therefore explores the ways in which individuals construct and define their experiences in order to make sense of their respective realities. It values each story and looks at the ways in which personal stories are constructed from larger cultural frameworks (Parker, 2005). Unlike the more positivistic nature of quantitative research, narrative research is deeply concerned with restoring an individual’s *agency* and exploring their subjective experiences within the historical and social context of their time. It looks at issues of *temporality*, or events that occurred in a particular temporal frame, whilst acknowledging and exploring the incongruent narration of some stories. It explores the particular *events* of significance that came to shape and define an individual’s narrative, and by extension,

identity. It also aims to ‘helicopter out’ on personal narratives and gain perspective of the larger social/cultural contexts impacting the individual and influencing the creation of their personal narrative. As its additional aim, narrative research explores the ways in which stories are told and the *structures* they take. Parker (2005) argues that a story’s format or structure is as important as its content, and should be explored in terms of the literary genre it communicates and how this may shed light on its interpretation (Parker, 2005).

3.1.3. The act of narrating

The act of narrating is a complex process whereby the individual recalls or remembers past events and selects, organizes, reframes, and justifies relevant events in a way that will portray a particular story to the audience (Riessman, 2008). For this reason it is interesting to explore the events selected and the way they are organized in order to gain insight to the type of message the narrator is seeking to convey. Through narrating, individuals may remember and make sense of past events; argue and persuade audiences; invite others to share and bear witness to personal experiences; entertain; and challenge others to become involved in a social/political movement. The process of narrating or story-telling is one of finding, fixing, and defining one’s identity (Riessman, 2008)^v.

However narrative, and the process of narrating, has changed significantly over the years. During the 1960s and 1970s the traditional novel was challenged: the distinguishing features of the classic narrative, that is, “the unconditional adoption of chronological development, linear plots, a regular graph of the emotions, the way each episode tended towards an end...everything aimed at imposing the image of a stable universe, coherent continuous, univocal and wholly decipherable” were contested and revised (Robbe-Grillet, 1965, cited in Kearney, 2002, p. 127). This was largely due to the emergence of war stories^{vi} that did not adhere to the classic narrative model. Kearney (2002) argues that atypical narrative accounts are disconcerting for the reader because traditionally, stories are bound between the physical confines of the novel, which gives the story a shape of beginning and end. He argues that each life is in search of a narrative not only because individuals strive for creating order from disorder and meaning from the meaningless, but also because human existence is itself arranged temporally: we seek to place events in a temporal framework because we are born into a temporal structure that contains both birth and death. However, as an individual narrates a personal story, there is a continual flow between the past (contained in memory) and the future (represented by projections), and sometimes this flow is neither coherent nor

conventional. The narrative analyst has a responsibility to acknowledge the different forms of story-telling and explore the reasons for 'deviations'.

3.1.4. Narrative analysis

According to Riessman (2008, p. 11), "Narrative analysis refers to a family of methods for interpreting texts that have in common a storied form". She identifies four main approaches to narrative analysis, each with their own principal area of focus. In short, *thematic* narrative analysis focuses on the content of stories and the themes therein, exploring the 'what' was said, rather than the way or manner in which it was said; *structural* narrative analysis focuses on the 'way' a story takes shape and the structure it occupies in order to convey the narrator's narrative aim; *dialogic* or performative narrative analysis examines the way narratives are co-constructed by the narrator and the audience or investigator; and *visual* narrative analysis explores how images used come to form part of the created narrative (Riessman, 2008). While the approaches are not mutually exclusive and often overlap each other, the specific type of analysis is selected on the basis of the primary area of analytic inquiry.

As I was interested in researching the *contexts* under which street-based sex workers entered sex work, their *experiences* within the industry, and the *meanings* they made of these experiences, a narrative analysis focusing on content was selected as an appropriate analytic approach. A thematic narrative analysis, which pays attention to *what* is said, rather than *how* or *why* it is said, was thus selected. A thematic narrative analysis is different to a grounded theory analysis of qualitative data in that it aims to keep stories intact and generate themes primarily within cases, and to a lesser extent, across cases (Riessman, 2008). While it does not pay much attention to the local context of the interview (that is, the influence of the researcher in constructing the narrative), it does explore themes in relation to broader contexts, exploring the impact that social, political, historical and cultural narratives have on the development of personal narratives, and identifying the latent messages beneath the thematic identifications to bring about further insight and interpretation (Riessman, 2008). This may be achieved through exploring the content of narratives so that one is able to shed light on the social contexts in which narratives are constructed and conveyed, and aid the process of narrative analysis (Esterberg, 2002).

3.2. Methodology

3.2.1. Making contact

The data collection process appeared as a more challenging aspect of the research. In my preliminary reading of studies done on sex work, I found that there were a few sex worker organisations that had worked with and published research pertaining to sex work, and my initial thoughts were to approach an organisation or association in the hopes of making contact with sex workers. I found that there are but a handful of sex worker organisations/groups in South Africa that seek to support, aid, educate and work in the lives of sex workers, and access to such organisations is not particularly easy. My experience of making contact with such organisations was not an accommodating one. Fortunately, I was approached by a past classmate who had heard of my research and put me in contact with someone who had been involved with a sex work organisation and was open to providing me with the advice and direction I might need. I will forever be indebted to this person. She told me about an upcoming book launch where I was introduced to two sex workers who were interested in speaking to me about their experiences. I also introduced myself to a sex worker who had been on the panel for a sex work forum and she agreed to meet with me for an interview. From this initial contact, I was able to gain greater accessibility through a process of “snow-balling”, in which I was put in contact with other sex workers who were interested in participating in my research. This enabled me to make contact with a group of people who were more difficult to reach, and participants were thus selected based on accessibility, and without excluding any particular group.

3.2.2. The participants

The following table summarises the basic descriptive information pertaining to the participant’s ‘profile’, in order to provide the reader with an overview of the individuals interviewed. It tabulates the participants interviewed, their ages, gender, length of time working in the sex work industry, and place of work (where they practiced sex work from) at the time of the interview^{vii}. A more detailed and individualised descriptive account of each participant can be referred to in Appendix A of the study, whereby a brief summation of each individual’s narrative has been created and provided as a tool for the reader to gain a fuller description of the participants interviewed. Please refer to these narrative summaries throughout the study in order to contextualize narrative extracts.

Participant	Age	Gender	Time working in the industry	Place of work
Anna	23	Transgendered	3.5 years	Street/internet
Bhavani	38	Female	3 years	Street
Clarissa	49	Female	25 years	Street
Portia	29	Female	5 years	Truck stop
Ellie	35	Female	10 years	Truck stop
Fran	48	Female	11 years	Street
Gilly	42	Female	8 years	Street
Honey	30	Female	10 years	Street
Izzy	28	Female	9 years	Truck stop
Kathy	47	Female	28 years	Street
Leandre	34	Transgendered	12 years	Street
Marian	33	Female	1 year	Street
Natasha	27	Female	9 years	Brothel
Odelle	34	Female	17 years	Brothel

3.2.3. Collecting the data

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten female truck stop/street-based sex workers, two transgendered^{viii} street-based/internet-based sex workers and two female brothel-based^{ix} sex workers. Interviews averaged on 40 minutes and under recommendation, each individual was paid R100 for the interview in order to compensate them for their time and travel expenses. Interviews took place in a restaurant/canteen/coffee shop on three occasions, in my car on nine occasions, and in a brothel on one occasion, and were recorded on a digital Dictaphone and transcribed by myself.

At the beginning of each interview I explained the nature of the research and read through the consent form with the participant. The consent form (see Appendix B) assured the participant's anonymity, requested to record the interview and take additional notes if necessary, and explained that interviews would be transcribed and used in the research project. Each interview began with a formal question asking individuals if they would like to tell me the story about how they came to be involved in sex work. This served to elicit a

narrative response from the individual from which additional questions requiring explanation and development were asked. Three questions, reflective of my three particular research interests, developed through the course of the research and were phrased to the participants when I judged the questions appropriate to the context of what the participant was talking about, provided they had not addressed them already. These questions had no formal wording or structure, however sought to elicit responses that might inform me of the context of their entry, their experiences working, and the meanings they had made of their experiences and that of working. At the end of each interview I asked the participants to give me feedback about how they had felt in the interview and how they had felt speaking about their experiences. During this time I provided participants with any additional information they required about the study and provided them with the necessary information needed for contacting a counsellor if they so desired.

3.2.4. Analysing the data

In analysing the interview transcripts, I first traced a timeline of their experiences, recording the significant events that occurred before their entry and during their time working within the sex work industry. Significant dates and events were recorded and marked as significant when they came to impact the individual's decision to enter, stay or leave sex work. I then identified the contextual issues surrounding their decision to enter sex work and the story of their first experience. Narrated experiences were then traced, particularly those that were influential in maintaining their presence within the industry. Finally I gleaned through the transcripts and identified the meanings participants made of their experiences, including how their experiences were spoken about, interpreted, and reflected upon. A compilation of themes was then created from each transcript, identifying the main thematic material unique to each narrative interview according to the overarching divisions of context, experiences and meaning. Main sub themes within context, experiences and meaning, shared commonly across transcripts, were derived and explored.

3.2.5. Limitations of the study

Qualitative research often draws on information gathered from small samples. This brings into question the feasibility of generalising findings to the larger population. Looking at the individual narratives of 14 participants was not expected to not shed light on the experiences and perceptions of all sex workers in South Africa. It did however, bring insight to the ways in which individuals constructed their narratives and interpreted their realities, as well as

provided a canvas for studying processes of story-telling and change, and the influence of social, political, and cultural contexts on the development of individual scripts. It allowed 14 individuals to voice their experiences of sex work and contribute towards the growing body of research that seeks to bridge the gap between the 'knower' and the 'known', and draw those on the margin into the process of creating knowledge (see Wahab, 2003).

It is recognised that the study may have been limited in employing a narrative approach to data collection. While the narrative approach is beneficial in allowing for a more balanced interchange of power between the researcher and the 'researched', it is somewhat vague in its methodological implementation and interpretation. This was acknowledged during the early stages of the research process and the unstructured nature of the interviews was reviewed. Interviews became more focused when the three specific research interests of my study were identified, and research questions, reflecting those interests, were developed.

As previously mentioned, thematic narrative analysis tends to neglect exploring the impact of the local context on a story's narration. This may lead readers to perceive the narrative as an uninterrupted account of an individual's experiences and view the narrative as an individually constructed account. The perhaps unnatural requirement for individuals to promptly narrate their personal stories to a stranger (especially given the highly stigmatized nature of the topic) can also be seen as a limitation of the approach. Murray (2003), in acknowledging this as a valid limitation, suggests that meeting with participants on several occasions may reduce the anxiety associated with sharing one's narrative with a stranger. While this may help modify the approach's limitations, it is important to note that it may not be feasible as a practical and realistic option, as often (and in the case of this study) participants do not have the time and/or will to participate in a prolonged research process, and the researcher may not have the financial support to fund such processes. Having acknowledged this potential limitation of a thematic narrative approach, I have at different points in the study addressed the possible issue of my presence and influence in the interview, in terms of how the participant may have perceived me and narrated her experiences and meanings accordingly.

Lastly, Riessman (2008) warns that during data analysis, the researcher needs to be aware of how they have constructed a particular story from a participant's narrative. Furthermore, Parker (2005) cautions the researcher against interpreting an individual's narrative as 'truth' or searching for underlying meanings that are not necessarily communicated. The aim of

narrative research should not be to seek out the 'truth' but to rather explore the ways in which individuals construct and define their narratives in order to examine the ways their experiences become true to them (Parker, 2005). With this in mind, a focus on how narrative experiences and meanings were constructed and described was made. Under the guidance of my supervisor, I was reminded to avoid falling into 'truth telling' and to return to a focus on how, and the possible reasons why, the content of stories was constructed in a particular way.

3.2.6. Ethical considerations

3.2.6.1. Harm

Due to the stigma that is associated with sex work and the violence and discrimination it attracts, there was an awareness of the possible reluctance participants might have felt in speaking to me about their experiences and work. Having done preliminary reading on the antecedents of entry into sex work and the types of experiences sex workers may have had, I was aware that interviews might elicit emotional responses from participants and feelings of discomfort. I was aware too, through reviewing a number of qualitative studies, that sex workers were often interested in contributing towards research and having the opportunity to voice their experiences, and were found to have been glad that they had participated in research (see Fick, 2005; Maher, 1997; Wahab, 2003). I sought to create an environment where participants felt comfortable and secure and in control of the direction and duration of the interview. This was achieved through ensuring the privacy and comfort of the participant in the interview environment and assuring them of confidentiality and anonymity through informed consent.

3.2.6.2. Informed consent

At the start of each interview, I introduced myself to the participant and my affiliation to the University of Cape Town, and explained the nature of the study and the interview to follow. The consent form (Appendix B) was handed to the participant to read through as I read through it with them, and offered to answer any questions they had. The consent form informed participants of the nature of the study, the questions that were to be asked of them, and their right to refrain from disclosing any information they felt uncomfortable to disclose. It emphasized voluntary participation and assured participants of confidentiality and anonymity, and the protection of their identities. It informed participants of the estimated length of the interview; notified them that interviews would be recorded on a Dictaphone and

then transcribed by myself; and assured them that the recordings would be held secure and the information used for purely research purposes. It informed them that they would be compensated to the value of R100 for their time in participating in the interview. Finally, the consent form informed participants that necessary information^x would be provided to them if they desired to speak to a professional counsellor on completion of the interview. Assistance in making contact with a counsellor or counselling group was offered, if required, along with the setting up of further unpaid interviews if individuals felt they wanted to speak more about their experiences. Once read and understood, the consent form offered participants the opportunity to sign their names using their real or fictitious names, and asked for their permission for me to take notes during the interview if necessary.

3.2.6.3. Confidentiality

As contained in the consent form, participants were assured of their anonymity and confidentiality. They were given pseudonyms in the interview transcripts in order to protect their identities, and have been referred to by their pseudonyms in this study. Information that exposed any aspect of their identities was removed from the transcripts and replaced with letters of the alphabet, or the word ('location'), for example, when a particular location of their work or living quarters was referred to. The names of any sex worker organisation or group that participants were affiliated to have been removed from the quotations cited in this study in order to further secure participants' anonymity.

3.2.6.4. Debriefing and referrals

At the end of each interview, participants were asked to share their experience of, and feelings towards the interview process, as well as provide any feedback they had. It was during this time that participants were able to ask any further questions about the research or be provided with the necessary information needed for making contact with a counsellor or counselling group. Information for counselling was requested on one occasion: in speaking about issues of rape, Izzy became increasingly agitated and upset. The recording was stopped during which time I asked Izzy if she had ever received counselling after she was raped. She replied that she had not and I provided her with the information necessary for making contact with a counsellor if she was interested, and offered to accompany her if she desired. We resumed the interview when Izzy felt ready to continue, though I informed her that we could end the interview at that point if she preferred. A few weeks after the interview, I made contact with Izzy via text message and a phone call, asking her how she was and whether she

had made contact with a counsellor. She replied that she was “okay” and reported that she had not made contact with a counsellor and was unsure about whether she would. I re-sent her the relevant information and asked her to let me know if she required assistance in making contact, but did not hear from her further.

Most participants reflected that they felt comfortable in the interview and were glad they had spoken about their experiences, noting that it felt good to bring the contents of the ‘secret life’ into the open. At the end of each interview I informed participants that additional unpaid meetings could be arranged if they felt they wanted to speak more about their experiences. While some participants indicated that they might be interested in arranging an additional meeting, they did not contact me further. This may have been because individuals would not be compensated for future meetings, finances of which were not available to me.

Having outlined the particular design, methodology, limitations and ethical considerations of this study, the following chapter presents a thematic narrative analysis of sex work. As described within the methodology section of this chapter, thematic narrative analysis seeks to derive narrated themes both within and between cases and relate these to the broader social and cultural scripts surrounding an individual. A focus on content calls for a description of the events narrated within the main analytical themes of context, experiences, and meaning explored in this study, as narrative intent and the influences of social and political agendas are taken into consideration. It is important to mention here that the possible influence that my presence^{xi} as the ‘researcher’ played on the selection and narration of events by participants, has been acknowledged and reflected upon at different points within the analysis. Chapter four thus presents a description of narrated events, arranged within the structures of context, experiences and meaning, and discusses their significance and possible intent for individuals as they were recalled and constructed by them. Quotations and cases have at times been used to provide an illustration of analytical findings, and may be contextualized within the core narratives contained in Appendix A.

CHAPTER 4: NARRATIVES OF SEX WORK - A THEMATIC NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

4.1. CONTEXT

The theme of *context* refers to the circumstances under which the individual decided to enter sex work. It explores the reasons and events that are mentioned by the participant as influential in her decision to enter sex work, and the background and development of such reasons and/or events. Three main contextual themes were identified across transcripts. They included the desire for money/independence; childhood abuse and/or neglect; and a stressful trigger and introduction to the industry. These contextual themes will be explained and explored in terms of the ways in which the individual, in the construction of her narrative, identified them as significant.

4.1.1. The desire for money/ independence

“I just wanted to be independent. And I wanted to earn money.” (Clarissa)^{xii}

A common thread running throughout the narratives of all 14 participants was the connection between a desire for money and the participants’ entry into sex work. This desire for money was at times described as being the result of not being able to find work and needing to support oneself and a number of dependants, and at times coupled with a desire for independence.

For a number of participants, a desperate need for money was contextualized in situations where they did not have the necessary educational/technical experience to find alternative work (related to a past of childhood neglect/abuse), and had been heavily reliant upon a male supporter. Their frustrated dependence upon others for financial and/or material support was constructed as the antecedent that led to their pursuit of financial income by means of sex work. These individuals described themselves being in a position of no income and no alternative means of finding that income:

“I’m a single parent but I have the children. I (was) looking for a job but I couldn’t find a job, that’s why I decided to be a sex worker.” (Gilly)

Narratives often developed from reasons owing to financial need and powerlessness to stories that contextualized the framework in which desperate financial need developed. One is able to see the development of a story through the extract taken from the beginning of Marian's narrative cited below. Marian recalled that she entered sex work because she needed money and had no job, and continued to explain the broader circumstantial constraints surrounding her lack of finances, saying:

I don't have a choice I didn't work, I've got two kids, my sister, she was pregnant, so I need money that time...the father of my kids killed himself...so how could I bury him, I don't have nothing so I need money.

There seemed to be a relationship between a severe financial need (when a male provider became absent in some way) and entry into sex work. It appeared that it was due to this dependence that individuals found themselves ill-equipped and unable to provide for themselves in their provider's absence, and sex work was seen as a viable option to provide support without the requirement of educational or technical skills. The lack of a male provider was constructed as a reason for why individuals had entered sex work, as well as the presence of a past of childhood neglect/abuse which had impacted their ability to gain educational and technical skills.

Sex work was at times constructed by individuals as a path taken because there was no other option, and at times constructed as an explicit decision made by individuals to better their circumstances. This can be seen when one considers the words of Izzy and Gilly cited below:

"Ah I don't, I don't enjoy (sex work). Because I'm just telling myself that...I'm just doing it because I need money. That's all." (Izzy)

"I not feel safety but I work for my kids, I don't have (a) husband, I'm a single parent but I have the children. I (was) looking for a job but I couldn't find a job that's why I decided to be a sex worker."(Gilly)

While participants such as Izzy framed their entry into sex work from a place of passivity, others framed their entry into sex work from one of activity. For individuals such as Gilly, entry into sex work was commonly constructed as a choice that was made because a male

provider had become absent in some way, and was described as being the means of providing for one's dependents in a manner that would not require educational/technical skill.

On other occasions, individuals reported entering sex work when they were earning an income that was perhaps insufficient to cater for their needs and those of their dependants. Sex work was chosen as an alternative vocation in order to provide the individual with more money than she may have earned elsewhere and provide her with the means of becoming more independent. Consider the case of Bhavani, who constructs her desire for money and entry into sex work as due to her recent unemployment, the single support of her two children, and acquired drug habit. She saw sex work as a quick way to earn an income and while she had more than 10 years experience working in a factory and could have found more factory work, she stayed in sex work because her income was far greater than it had been when she worked in the factory. She said:

And like, when I would (be) sitting in the factory I had to work (a) whole week without money, and at the Friday I would get my pay but on the street I'd make more money than to wait (for) Friday's pay. And that's how I begin to do sex work.

Bhavani also indicated a desire for independence and freedom, explaining that she was living with her "sugar daddy" and often ran away from him when she felt "trapped" and wanted to be alone. After further enquiry about the nature and conditions of the relationship, Bhavani communicated that it was important for her to earn her own money and be able to support her children. She did not like relying upon another person for financial means and desired the independence and freedom associated with providing for herself. She also recalled refusing to work for her boyfriend on the street because she desired the independence to support her own drug habit.

Entry into sex work was thus constructed as an escape from financial, drug, and relational dependence for some participants. It was spoken about as an empowering decision sex workers made in order to become more independent. This independence was desired above dependence on another for either money or drugs, and at times, the desire to enter sex work was related more to an individual's desire for independence than to their desire for money. For example, Anna constructed her entry into sex work during a time when she was desperate to show herself and others that she could make it on her own and could be independent. Sex

work was defined as the means by which Anna would show others that she would not be a “failure in life”.

“It’s almost like being desperate to show people, that you can make it. I wasn’t desperate for money, I was desperate to state a point. That’s what I was desperate about.”

This observation is supported by the findings of Gysels et al. (2002) and Stadler and Delany (2006), who observed that while most of the sex workers they interviewed were from low economic backgrounds, their entry may have been more related to a desire for economic and social independence than as a means of survival. Gould and Fick (2006) also note that 76% of the sex workers they interviewed reported entering the industry for economic reasons and continued to work because they were able to generate more money than they would in other forms of employment. For these participants in the current study, technical/educational inexperience was therefore not constructed as the primary reason for entry, which was shown to be present in the lives of a number of other participants.

The desire for money was thus the most commonly shared contextual sub theme for the reason as to why individuals had entered sex work. This finding is supported by those of Campbell et al. (1998), Maher (1997), Stadler and Delany (2006), Wojcicki and Malala (2001) and others, who note that sex workers reported entering sex work out of economic necessity and no job opportunities available to them as unskilled and uneducated women. At times the desire for money was contextualized during a time when individuals were not earning any money and needed to support themselves and their dependents, and was at other times attributed to a desire to earn more money than that they were already earning. Reasons for a lack of income, reported by the former participants, were generally attributed to a lack of education and/or technical skills, and an inability to work because they were relying upon a male provider, while the latter individuals desired independence as an additional freedom. In such cases, a desire for independence may have at times had more of an impact on their decision to enter sex work than unavailable work may have had, as each of these individuals (in exception of Izzy) had experience working in alternative work yet chose to pursue sex work as a means of generating money and working towards becoming more independent. Technical/educational inexperience was often explained to be the result of childhood abuse/neglect and the result of a patriarchal system at work in the home, where women typically relied on the income of their male provider(s). Childhood abuse/neglect will thus be

looked at as a possible contributing factor to technical/educational inexperience and by extension, entry into sex work.

4.1.2. Childhood neglect/abuse

“If I ask(ed) (for) the money for school fees to him (Ellie’s grandmother), (s)he told me (s)he don’t have the money. That is why I was joining to be a sex worker.” (Ellie)

It was found that entry into sex work was associated with childhood abuse/neglect for a number of participants. Childhood neglect may have taken the form of negligence on the part of the caregiver, where the participant did not receive adequate or appropriate care and was not provided with the necessary technical or educational skills to find work. In addition to childhood neglect, childhood abuse took the form of physical and/or sexual violation of the individual’s body and basic human rights. Childhood neglect/abuse was seen to be significant in the individual’s decision to enter sex work when technical/educational inexperience (the result of childhood neglect/abuse) was mentioned as an important reason for why individuals had chosen to enter sex work, as illustrated by Ellie’s quote introducing the present sub theme.

Childhood neglect/abuse was constructed as significant in an individual’s entry into sex work because it came to affect her ability to gain technical/educational skills needed for finding alternative work. For these individuals, sex work was seen as an easy way to make money and gain one’s independence and in this way provided an ideal opportunity for those who did not have the necessary vocational skills to make their money quickly and easily. In addition to reports of childhood neglect/abuse, there were three cases of reported childhood sexual abuse, where ‘sexual brokenness’ was considered to be influential in an individual’s entry into sex work. The association between a ‘sexual brokenness’ and entry into sex work is a topic covered in detail by Clarissa, who unprompted, began to talk about the “psychology of sex workers”. She maintained:

It takes a lot of guts to...charge men for sex. You must be, like something in you is broken, I personally was raped as a virgin.

In drawing a relationship between childhood abuse/neglect, technical/educational inexperience, and entry into sex work, popular assumptions, and previous research findings

(see James & Meyerding, 1977; Potter, et al., 1999; Silbert & Pines, 1981, 1983) testifying to the relationship between childhood abuse and entry into sex work, are supported. One can question the narrative intent behind incorporating abusive experiences into one's narrative: through framing one's presence in the sex work industry from a perspective of constraint owing to educational/technical inexperience and childhood neglect/abuse, participants may have framed their decision to enter sex work from one owing to difficult life circumstances, hinting at a lack of agency in their entry. Alternatively, individuals may have clung to agency and volition in entering sex work, while acknowledging the presence and impact that childhood abuse may have had on their decision to enter sex work. Clarissa communicated a knowledge and insight into the topics explored by research into sex work, and asserted that she was well-read in topics of psychology. Her narrative was interesting in its unprompted direction and coverage of topics relating to sex work (for example, what she called the "psychology of sex work" and "why do men go to sex workers"), which not only suggested her desire to contribute to well-known topics covered by research, but also highlighted her role in leading the direction of the interview. It was therefore interesting to juxtapose Clarissa's narrative with the narrative of another knowledgeable individual who did not construct childhood neglect/abuse as an influential antecedent to her entry into sex work, although it was part of her history. Anna maintained:

"I had a very difficult childhood, but that didn't make me a sex worker...and all the circumstances didn't make me a sex worker." (Anna)

Anna's assertions were significant in their relation to current literature on the reasons why individuals enter sex work. They showed an awareness and knowledge of theoretical debate and were thus significant in the message they communicated. Anna's message was one that asserted that her entry into sex work had neither to do with childhood neglect/abuse, nor the absence of her biological father, communicating therefore, a strong sense of agency in her presence within the sex work industry. Her narrative stood in contrast to those that maintained entry from a perspective lacking agency, yet did not necessarily stand in contrast to Clarissa's narrative in its entirety. While both Anna and Clarissa communicated a sense of knowing and an agency in their presence within the sex work industry, they differed on perspectives relating to the reasons why individuals enter and stay in sex work. While Clarissa supported the narrative that maintains an association between entry into sex work

and 'sexual brokenness' (although not in its entirety), Anna chose to construct an alternative narrative, which countered this perspective.

To summarise then, a number of individuals attributed entry into sex work to the effects of neglect and abuse experienced in childhood. They maintained that adequate technical/educational skills to find alternative work were not acquired in childhood and it became necessary to look towards sex work in order to survive. In such cases, a decision to enter sex work was constructed from a perspective lacking agency. This may have served to lessen feelings of guilt and shame associated with entering sex work on a personal level, or may have served to present a story that they wished me, as their audience, to hear. The traditional narrative as reported by research, that recognised an association between childhood neglect/abuse and entry into sex work, was at times supported, and on one occasion, wholly challenged.

4.1.3. A stressful trigger and introduction to the industry

"And I was like, the house went down, my everything because I was just smoking and smoking all my money. And I went to hospital, I lost my job, and that's how I got into more drugs." (Bhavani)

With the foundations of a desire for money/independence and a lack of technical/educational skills owing to neglect and abuse experienced in childhood, it appeared that individuals entered sex work when a particular trigger situation was coupled with a "way in" or introduction to the industry. Trigger situations were stressful events that came to influence the individual's decision to enter sex work. This trigger may have taken the form of a serious financial concern, loss of employment, the death or loss of a provider, the need to support one's drug habit, and through a story of escape. It may also have taken the form of desiring to prove a point and hitting "rock bottom" (Anna). The time leading up to entry was constructed by a number of participants as a time when the individual was "suffering" and was in a place of desperation. Entry into sex work was constructed either from a perspective of "no choice" or from one that involved the participant taking an active role to better her circumstances, illustrated by the quote below:

"I've got a lot of family, they can't help me. I just help myself." (Gilly)

The stress and chaos characterising the time preceding entry can be seen in light of its narration. Stressful events that led individuals to enter sex work were spoken about in an incongruent and disorderly manner that described the picture of growing desperation and chaos preceding entry into sex work. With an introduction to the industry, entry into sex work then stood as the pinnacle event of a story of growing stress and disorder and was portrayed in a way that brought relief from the stress.

A number of participants explained that sex work was not something they had anticipated, and reported feeling shocked when they realised the nature of the work in which they were and were about to partake. Twelve of 14 participants reported entering sex work when a friend(s) introduced them to it while one participant reported being introduced to sex work by her sister and another by her partner. For a number of individuals, entry into sex work was accommodated by friends who were already working within the industry. For example, Clarissa was living in a place where the resident girls sometimes went to the nightclubs to go and meet foreign customers. She began to go with the other girls and was introduced to sex work through these outings. She described a progressive introduction to working in the nightclubs and in sex work, saying:

“And like weekends ordinary Cape Town people used to come and jol there. So then I asked these girls and then I started going at night with them to the nightclub”.

In spite of such knowledge, however, individuals proceeded to engage in sex work because the need for money was identified as being more important than a decision not to engage in sex work. While an element of surprise and shock characterised entry into sex work, individuals communicated that the desperation in having no alternative way of making money motivated their decision to enter or continue in sex work.

“Um I was shocked. And then I told her I don’t have money. What am I going to do? I must go with her to get the money.” (Ellie)

Introduction to the industry during a particularly stressful time in the individual’s life paved the way for entry into sex work. According to this study’s findings, all participants reported entering sex work when they were introduced to it by another person. Entry into sex work was at times a thought-out endeavour and at times more of a progressive experience. It was

also at times constructed as an event that was not anticipated and thus brought feelings of shock and surprise to the individual when the realization of sex work occurred. In constructing entry into sex work during a time when individuals were under extreme stress, sex work was portrayed as a logical work avenue to meet pressing financial and living strain.

Having explored the three main contextual themes surrounding individuals' entry into sex work, one can see that while each individual's story was unique, there were a number of thematic similarities regarding the ways in which they constructed their entry into sex work. Each individual entered sex work because they were in need of money. The need for money was heightened during a particularly stressful time in the individual's life, when triggers of a loss of employment, loss of a male provider, family tension, and abusive home environments amplified the individual's need to provide for themselves and their dependents. Entry into sex work was at times related to participants' inability to work due to limited education/skills of a neglected childhood and/or because their work inexperience was a result of their providers not giving them the opportunity to work. A need for money was at times coupled with a greater need for independence, and the ability to provide for oneself and one's dependents without having to rely upon others for financial support. A "way in" to the industry, achieved through an introduction by friends or family, then paved the way for individuals to enter sex work.

4.2. EXPERIENCES

The theme of experiences refers to the different events sex workers selected, recalled, and spoke about in their work. The experiential sub themes generated from the data include stories of the individual's first sex work experience; danger and discrimination; life on the street; and clients.

4.2.1. First sex work experience

"I didn't feel good because I know that I didn't want to be with him, but because I had to be with him because I need(ed) money." (Izzy)

Participants generally communicated mixed opinions of their first sex work encounter. While the majority of participants recalled daunting and unpleasant experiences of their first sex work encounter, they decided to continue working. Apprehension was often driven by a fear that they might be discovered and 'found out' by their friends or family. A number of

individuals described feeling uncomfortable because it was their first time having sexual intercourse with men they neither knew nor liked, and the discomfort of the first sex work experience was described as acute for individuals who struggled to incorporate their experiences into their moral core. For example, Fran recalled feeling deeply conflicted by fears that she was sinning and that her children would find out how she made her money. She said:

...I was scared, I was really scared and then it was my first time, but 'I know how to sleep with a man but this', I was thinking, 'is a sin', and then, 'how will I tell my children where I get the money because they know it's my first day at work'.

The source of Fran's conflict was found in her feelings of satisfaction of sex work (in being able to provide for her family) in tension with those of guilt and fear that she would be discovered. This tension was shared by a number of participants who communicated a sense of initial discomfort and shame in their first sex work encounter, yet comfort and relief in their ability to earn money and provide for themselves and their dependents.

For some individuals, continuing in sex work after a bad first experience was simply out of necessity^{xiii}, and the result of feeling "already used" (Honey). However, while the majority of participants reported having a negative first sex work experience, this was not always the case. For Anna and Leandre the first experience was relatively enjoyable. Anna recalled feeling afraid yet reflected on her experience as, "not so bad", and actually, "nice" afterwards. Anna explained that she found her experience of sex work enjoyable because she found herself working with other sex workers who advised her as to the prices she should charge and found that clients were not as "scary" as she had previously been told, and were in fact "really really nice". Leandre similarly described her first experience as being enjoyable, saying that she enjoyed the role sex work provided for her:

And to be honest with you I really enjoy it for the mere fact it(s) nice to be a social worker to some clients you know...giving him information and things like that. It's so nice to being something like that.

While the first sex work experience was generally constructed as one that was unpleasant and daunting, individuals explained that they continued in sex work because of the developing

enjoyment of the work found in the comfort and relief it brought them in being able to provide for themselves and their dependents; the feeling of being “already used” (Honey); and seeing sex work as a job. It was also found to a lesser degree through the experience of being cared and provided for by another. While the majority of individuals framed this experience from a perspective of discomfort and dislike, Anna and Leandre cast a positive light on their first experience of sex work. Their narratives stood in contrast to the ways in which other participants constructed their first experience of sex work, asserting that it was an experience that was both enjoyable and fun.

4.2.2. Danger and discrimination

“Being raped, makes you really fokked up. It makes you angry, because you can’t actually, and especially as a sex worker, because you can’t go and report it at the police.” (Anna)

Experiences of danger and discrimination were rife in the lives of the women I interviewed and form a substantial theme within stories of experience. Each individual came with her own story (experienced directly or indirectly) of violence, experienced because of the prejudice and discrimination expressed towards sex workers by clients and police. Stories of particular chill involved deep accounts of trauma experienced by the participants. Some participants were quick to recall episodes and experiences of violence and danger while others did not appear to be comfortable in giving account of their experiences: while participants such as Bhavani recalled, with such matter-of-fact narration, a story of being detained and raped by a client for two hours, other participants such as Izzy narrated their experiences through physical demonstrations of wounds, silences and tears. The manner of narration may have been determined by the degree to which individuals had managed to work through these adverse situations and whether they were able to articulate their experiences of trauma. Violence and abuse exercised by the hands of clients and police often produced feelings of powerlessness and helplessness in participants. They explained the reality that once they were in the client’s car, they were exposed to the will of the client, who may decide to ‘price’ the sex worker once her services had been offered, drive her to an unknown location where he could leave her, become violent, or rob her of her money.

Consider the cases of Portia and Fran, whose stories I have included in this sub theme because of the way in which they came to shape my own story and understanding of the lives of sex workers. Portia was deeply affected by an experience she had with a client who

threatened her life because she was a sex worker. He had contracted HIV through his dealings with sex work and had passed the infection to his wife. He blamed Portia for his wife's death as she stood to represent the sex worker who had caused his, and by extension, his wife's, illness and death. After picking Portia up and driving her to a remote location, he told her to strip and to jump off a cliff. She recalled the conversation, which in part stood like this:

“Lady I said jump, I want to kill you, because my wife was dead because of this, I brought this HIV into my wife. So I'm stress(ed) when I saw prostitute, I get angry. I'm going to kill you lady.”

Portia described the events that followed. The two argued and fought physically until a police car drove past, saw them both naked, and interrupted the struggle. Both individuals gave an account of their stories to the police, but Portia chose not to open a case because she felt that the case would not go anywhere, and asked the police to drive her home instead. In reflecting upon this event, Portia communicated a deep sense of hurt and anger felt towards the client who had acted violently towards her because of a prejudiced assumption he held about sex workers and their HIV status. She expressed that she too, felt angry and hurt because she had not willingly contracted HIV and felt that clients must take responsibility for protecting themselves from infection and those people who they come to infect. She recalled:

“That time I was afraid to die. But inside my heart I was very angry. You see I was very crying inside my heart.”

Prejudice and discrimination in sex work was described as particularly painful when individuals felt that clients were determining their self-worth. Izzy recalled a situation where a client had approached her and offered her R50 for her sexual services. She reflected:

“I don't want R50 he just, he's pricing me. He doesn't want me to tell him how much do I charge”.

Wojcicki and Malala (2001) similarly quote one of their interviewees in her experiences of being 'priced' by a client. I have used the exact quotation cited by Wojcicki and Malala (2001, pp. 105-106) because it illustrates the affect that 'pricing' of services, and by extension, the self, has on a sex worker. It reads:

When they have to pay they will reduce you to nothing. They forget that they are the ones who come to us. We don't force them. So I don't understand why they give us problems before paying us.

While I was at the...we use to wait outside in the streets. The motorists would make a joke out of you. The clients also humiliate us. You find that after providing sex to a client, he wants to pay you R10. When I was still at...I was raped by a client in his car. We agreed on our deal. On our way to his place he bought me an ice cream. After the service he became violent and did not pay me. I consider that as rape because I am not worth an ice cream.

It was communicated that the prejudice and stigma surrounding sex work was instrumental in feeding behaviours of discrimination and violence exercised towards sex workers and women by clients and police, illustrated by the following story. Portia had been picked up by a client having been under the impression that she was offering her sexual services. When they arrived at his house he told her that she was to wash and iron his clothes and clean his house, that this was the type of 'business' he had called her to do. However, after cleaning his house and washing his clothes, Portia reported that the client said, "Lady now I'm going to fuck you". She continued to narrate the experience, illustrated in part below:

I said, 'If you're going to pay me I don't have a problem. You can fuck me'. He said, 'Okay I'm going to pay you for the washing and for fucking you'. I said, 'yes master'. He fucked me four rounds...After he finished to fuck me, he gave me R20. He opens the gate, 'go bitch'.

Portia told me that she left his house, and seeing the police in the street, attempted to report that she had been raped. She recalled the police responding that there was nothing they could do about it because as a sex worker, she could not be 'raped'.

What was highlighted as a source of distress perhaps greater than experiences of violence and trauma, was the frustration participants felt in not being able to report rape or client assaults because of the illegality of their work, as well as in the negative treatment they received at police stations. It has been argued that experiences of trauma are heightened when individuals feel unable to report violence to the police and feel that their experiences of trauma have been negated (Wojcicki & Malala, 2001). This is supported by the words of a sex worker quoted in

Wojcicki and Malala's (2001, p. 105) study who said, 'They'll ask you questions that will traumatize you even more like "Did you enjoy it (the rape)?"' The notion of being traumatized through the negation of a traumatic event was addressed somewhat by Anna, who communicated a double trauma in her experience of being raped. As illustrated in her quote introducing the present sub theme, Anna maintained that rape was worse for sex workers who could not report their experiences to the police.

In addition to the double/secondary trauma felt when experiences of violence were denied and negated by the police, participants narrated stories of primary trauma experienced when police were actively involved in perpetrating acts of violence towards them. Fran gave account of an experience she had when she was picked up by the police, driven to a hospital and forced at gunpoint to have sex with a police officer in the hospital's morgue. During the telling of her story, she became increasingly agitated and emotional, communicating that she was deeply traumatized by this event. The trauma she experienced demonstrated itself in the recalling of her experiences and its interference in her life. She said:

But this, it takes, it takes me long time it was on 2002, I take about I think two years to get better to forget about it, but when I talk about it, it reminds me and then even when I see a policeman I hate the policeman.

The endurance and interference of trauma in an individual's life can be better explained when one views trauma in relation to the literature. According to Smelser (2004), trauma, or the experiencing of trauma in a traumatic event, refers to a process whereby the individual is placed under a large degree of psychological stress, such that the individual feels overwhelmed by the experience and unable to cope with it. Earliest conceptualisations of trauma referred to it as being "a foreign body which long after its entry must continue to be regarded as an agent that is still at work" (Freud & Breuer, 1955 [1893-95], cited in Smelser, 2004, p. 33). Trauma is regarded as foreign in that it is not easily integrated into the individual's self-concept and overall life narrative, and consequently reappears and interferes in the lives of those it affects. It is argued that trauma endures as an unintegrated experience because, "Trauma survivors live not with memories of the past, but with an event that could not and did not proceed through to its completion...and therefore...continues in the present" (Laub, 1992, cited in Rose, 1999, p. 161).

While the majority of participants were able to verbalise their experiences of violence and danger, individuals who had encountered deep levels of trauma articulated their experiences through the physical demonstrations of wounds and the silence of tears. It has been argued that in cases of severe trauma, the English language fails to represent the experience and emotion of events that cannot be communicated linguistically (Schnell, 2000), or as Coixet (2005) noted, the process is one where, “Words – like shoals of fish – team around in our heads and crowd against our vocal chords, fighting to get out and be listened to by others. And sometimes they get lost on the journey from head to throat”. Here, gestures and providing physical evidence of trauma provide better testimony than that can be contained in words. This may explain the need for some participants to show, by demonstration of their scars, evidence of their wounds and traumas. In asking Izzy whether clients had been violent with her on many occasions, she replied:

“Many times. I’ve got cuts here, you see? One of my client(s) cut me with a knife here”

It can therefore be argued that in showing me her scars, Izzy not only validated her experiences of trauma to herself, but invited me to bear witness to her story. When trauma occurs at an individual or psychological level, it often impacts the lives of those who are close to the traumatized individual, and they become witnesses to the effects and consequences of trauma in that person’s life. The individual narrative of trauma thus becomes an interpersonal or collective narrative of trauma (Smelser, 2004). According to Smelser (2004), cultural traumas (an extension of the interpersonal/collective trauma) develop within damaged and insecure sociocultural contexts, such as ones that are damaged by war, economic insecurity and internal conflict and tension. The trauma becomes devastating on a cultural level when the cultural units and ties linking members of a society are threatened and broken; when trust in the basic functions of economic, medical, familial, educational and legal security are threatened and the society’s underlying values, beliefs and ideologies are called into question. This has great significance for communities that are not able to place their trust in the basic functions of society mentioned above.

This was found to be the case in the accounts of danger and violence provided by participants Kathy and Marian. Both individuals recalled a story about how they had been exposed to a violent situation where they were picked up by a client and taken to his house where they were forced to provide sexual services for a number of men and were “saved” by a younger

member of the group who convinced the other men to let them go. The stories showed striking similarity, and while there is the possibility that both individuals experienced such events, there is also the possibility that the individual experience of trauma contained in its narration came to impact the life and narrative of another.

Through the narration of experiences of danger, violence, discrimination and trauma, individuals illustrated the capacity of narrative to serve purposes of a “performance of the self as a story of identity” (Parker, 2005, p. 71), as outlined within the design section of chapter three. It was through the performance of trauma using physical demonstrations of wounds and tears that participants gave testimony of their individual stories and the identities they have come to hold.

4.2.3. Life on the street

“On Thursday I must go for my check ups, for my AIDS check up, for my blood, everything.”
(Bhavani)

In addition to experiences of danger and discrimination, participants spoke about their experiences of illness, poverty, and homelessness in their work. The experience (directly or indirectly) of illness, was central to a number of participants’ narratives. Illness took the form of having HIV/AIDS and/or the experience of regular check-ups and lifestyle changes associated with preventing infection and protecting oneself. Three of the participants reported having HIV, and a large part of the narratives of most participants included details of the routine checkups and preventative measures they took to prevent themselves from being infected.

Research has indicated that HIV and STIs are high amongst the sex worker population because “sex workers, on average, by the nature of their profession, are making many more sexual decisions (i.e. different partners, etc) on a daily basis than their non-sex-worker counterparts” (Maher, 1997; Stadler & Delany, 2006; Wojcicki & Malala, 2001, p. 101). Experiences of violence and danger were often coupled with those of illness due to the sexual compromises made in order to survive and protect oneself from further violence. Sexual compromises were made when individuals were desperate for money, or were threatened (directly or indirectly), by their client. For some participants, sexual compromise was dealt with in fairly routine ways of preventing illness that involved going to the clinic and taking

tablets to “clean” themselves, and for others, it was expressed as a source of great regret and distress when it was discovered that they had contracted HIV as a result:

“I can’t blame all the clients, it’s my problem, to get HIV because, why didn’t I use a condom the first time? Why? I was stupid I can’t blame anyone about myself.” (Portia)

Campbell et al. (1998, p. 51) argue, “Health-promoting sexual behaviours such as condom use are also determined by peoples’ negotiated social and sexual identities”, and maintain that in order for safe sexual behaviour to be promoted, it is necessary to address the social, cultural and communal contexts in which individuals’ sexual identities are constructed and rooted. The authors argue that knowledge about the health risks involved in unprotected sex form but a part of the driving force involved when individuals make sexual decisions. They assert that “health-promoting sexual behaviours” are also determined by:

the extent to which people feel empowered and are in control of their lives in general – which determines the likelihood that they will feel they are in control of their sexual health; the extent to which the organisation of peoples’ living and working conditions enables and supports the use of condoms

(Campbell et al., 1998, p. 51)

For the most part, individuals demonstrated an educated awareness about the risks involved in having unprotected sex, yet as argued by Campbell et al. (1998), health-promoting sexual behaviour is perhaps even more influenced by the contexts in which individuals’ sexual identities are constructed and reinforced. For individuals to express an educated awareness about the risks involved in having unprotected sex, they may have wished to construct their image and work from a perspective of respectability countering popular notions of engaging in careless and irresponsible sexual behaviour. This may also have had to do with my presence in the interview context. In representing the ‘outsider-looking-in’, I may have been seen as someone prejudiced towards sex workers and guilty of making generalised assumptions about their sexual and reproductive health. Participants may have wished to inform me that sex workers were not careless with their sexual conduct and the onus lay on the clients who were constructed as being sexually irresponsible.

Along with illness, life on the street was characterised by seasons of poverty and homelessness. Participants reported that money earned was used to meet the day's expenses and rarely enough to budget or save for the future. Participants described living from day-to-day and being unable to take a break from sex work. As a result of living from hand-to-mouth, individuals at times experienced varied degrees of homelessness. This is consistent with research findings: "Homelessness and residential instability" (Maher, 1997, p. 32) was reported to be prevalent amongst the women studied in Maher's (1997, p. 29) research into the lives of "more than 200 women drug users in three Brooklyn neighbourhoods", and who were involved in law-breaking activities (mainly sex work) in order to finance their drug habits. According to Maher (1997), 91% of these women "were homeless and alternated between the streets and various short term accommodations including shelters, the apartments of friends and associates, and the homes of elderly males." While some participants in the current study recalled having to "sleep with the bergies" (Bhavani) and in the park because they had no shelter, other individuals described living with a number of people at different points.

Life on the street was characterised by experiences of illness, poverty and homelessness, which were sources of great distress and uncertainty for individuals. Employment that provided a consistent salary was thus desired for the stability and security it would bring to individuals. For some participants, this translated into a desire to leave sex work to find more consistent and alternative forms of work, and for others it translated into a desire to work in more stable sex work environments such as in the brothel context, or in a more regulated form of legalized sex work.

4.2.4. Clients

"There's some clients...treat you as a prostitute you see?...some clients are very nice, others are very rude. You see but you just go because you want that money." (Honey)

The typical client was described with ambiguity. At times he was referred to as "bad" (Ellie), "full of shit" (Marian), and "dangerous" (Fran), and at other times described as "nice" (Anna), and "kind" (Bhavani). While he provided the sex worker with business and enabled her to provide for her family, he often showed aggression and prejudice towards her, and demonstrated hatred and violence in his treatment of her. His acceptance of her was described as conditional and fleeting, and his rejection of her, painful. Enter the regular client: who

offered support, consolation and affirmation, and lessened the intensity of financial distress. He stood to represent both a 'way out' of sex work and a reason why individuals stayed 'in', through the threat he posed to individuals in infringing on their social and financial independence. The client was thus portrayed with ambivalence, where he represented comfort and discomfort, love and hate, acceptance and rejection, and was thus for the most part, perceived with scepticism and distrust. The complexity of the sex worker/client relationship is a theme that is not easily defined, as illustrated in its discussion below.

While entering into relationships with clients was described as rare (Clarissa asserted that "you can't mix business with pleasure" and argued that entering into relationships with clients was "just not done" as a sex worker), individuals at times reported forming more exclusive relationships with their regular clients. While Portia did not indicate that she was in a 'conventional' relationship with a client, she spoke about her regular clients that did not do business with other sex workers. She reported feeling reassured in knowing that she could call a client and ask him to send her money when she was in need. Marian similarly reported receiving consolation and advice from clients yet also noted that while some of her clients made promises to give her money to leave sex work and start her own small business, they were not always reliable and expected to deal with her problems.

Exclusive relationships formed with clients were reported differently by various participants. For Anna, knowing about her exclusive client's life was not something she desired. She told me that while they had known each other for a year and had some form of relationship, she did not know anything about his life and chose it to be that way. In response to my asking her why this was the case, she replied that it was irrelevant for her to know the details of her client's life because she was first and foremost fulfilling a job. She asserted that knowing the details about his life (such as his wife's name, whether he had children, and what type of dog he had) would not help her in any way, and communicated that a sense of separation was necessary to her work. Anna spoke about the exclusive relationship she had with her client from a perspective that maintained distance: while the client brought her comfort, she did not report engaging with him on a very personal level, and portrayed herself as an actor in maintaining more of a superficial relationship.

At times exclusive and sometimes controlling relationships were also described as being suffocating and restrictive for individuals. It was interesting to look at the way in which

Bhavani characterised the relationship she had with her regular client because of the ambiguity in the way it was described. She mentioned that her “sugar daddy” did not want her to work on the streets anymore and ‘locked her up’ in order to keep her at home. While she described his confining her as something undesirable and against her will, she asserted that he was a loving and good person who locked her up because he loved her:

No he’s very sensitive, he’s very nice and (a) very good hearted person. And he loves me a lot. That’s why he locks me up every time when he go(es), to work or on a mission, or whatever he goes to then he locks me up. And that I can’t handle.

Bhavani’s desire for independence came into conflict with her partner’s desire for exclusivity and control, and resulted in her need to “run away”. This was similarly reported by other participants, who saw a relationship as undesirable insofar as it would mean an end to their financial and social independence, yet at times pursued relationships because they saw them as the means to having a better or “normal” life (Kathy). This is supported by the literature: Campbell et al. (1998 p. 53) found that amidst an intensely competitive climate, the women in their study “cherished the secret hope that a client might fall in love with them and agree to support them (so that they could give up their work in favour of a more dignified lifestyle)”^{xiv}. The pursuit of an exclusive relationship, then, was constructed as a means for individuals to be ‘saved’ from their circumstances, and by extension, their role and identity as a sex worker.

The pursuit of a client was framed in a climate of competition and rejection, and is spoken about by authors such as Campbell et al. (1998), Stadler and Delany (2006), and Wojcicki and Malala (2001). In their study, Campbell et al. (1998) noted that competition between sex workers for clients was rife in a context where levels of poverty were high and those of respect (for self and others) were low. Wojcicki and Malala (2001, p. 113) reported that sex workers dealt with competition by “beating up other women and passing negative remarks about the looks or behaviours of other sex workers to clients”. “Negative remarks” included comments that made clients believe other sex workers were taking drugs or were lying to clients; comments about other sex workers’ clothes; and gossip. Within the brothel context of the sex work industry, Stadler and Delany (2006, p. 456) found that sex workers expressed competition along lines of age, ethnicity and “country of origin”, and expressed “suspicion and hostility (which) sometimes emerged as witchcraft accusations” towards other sex

workers in the industry. Foreigners and younger women were most often recipients of conflict as they were seen to be ‘cheaper’ and more willing to have sex without condoms, and were more desired by customers respectively. While none of the individuals in this study reported actively “beating up” or showing overt aggression to other sex workers, comments were made regarding younger sex workers who were on drugs and who lowered the standard of sex work because of their sexual compromises (such as agreeing to have sex without a condom or demanding lower prices for sexual services because of desperate financial need). Competition typically took the form of generalisations that were made in line with the competitor’s age and ethnicity, and associated substance-abusing and low-sexual-standard behaviour, as illustrated by the quote below:

“And they’ve (sex workers who use drugs) sort of tainted the image of the sex work industry... a lot of them steal from the clients as well, so they put other girls in danger.”
(Clarissa)

Competition was commonly associated with experiences and feelings of rejection, expressed particularly by the older women in the study. Older participants expressed feelings of rejection and concern because they felt the financial consequences of competing with younger and more desirable sex workers. For example, Bhavani expressed that she has found it increasingly difficult to find business as she has got older and has questioned whether there is something “wrong” with her that prevents her from being able to make money like the other women. Odelle similarly expressed concern that she would have to begin getting the necessary training to find alternative work because clients “like the small girls now” and she has experienced increasingly more rejection by clients as she has got older. Individuals who were thus less likely to compete (because of perceived failure in the selection criteria exercised by clients) experienced feelings of inadequacy and rejection which may have been related to a growing sense of inactivity and helplessness. Having been described as a rather active response to one’s financial constraints, active competition stood in contrast to (and at times produced), feelings of passivity and rejection that rendered the participant feeling helpless and despondent.

The client was described as a source of both comfort and distress by the participants in this study. On a superficial level, he brought comfort to the sex worker when he treated her well and supplied the necessary financial support to help her provide for herself and her

dependents, and brought her distress when he exercised prejudiced assumptions about her and acted violently or disrespectfully towards her. On a deeper level, the client brought comfort to the sex worker when he accepted her, and brought distress to her when he rejected her. Competition between sex workers for the client's attention and business, as well as the rejection felt when he did not 'choose' an individual or select her for business, was a large part of the stories shared by participants about their clients. The regular client then provided the comfort and financial assurance to individuals when they were not able to find business on the street, but was perceived with scepticism when he threatened the individual's social and financial independence in offering her an exclusive relationship.

In summary of the theme of experiences, individuals communicated an initial shock and dislike of their first sex work encounter, and explained that continuation in sex work was the result of the feelings of comfort and relief it brought them in being able to provide for themselves and their dependents. In selecting and recalling experiences of violence and discrimination, sex workers constructed their work as being particularly dangerous and harmful to their physical, social, and psychological well-being. Stories of danger and trauma were at times beyond the scope of words: they were told through the physical demonstration of wounds and tears. Individual traumas became interpersonal, and then cultural traumas, when they were witnessed and shared by those who heard them. This was particularly the case when individuals expressed that they could not trust the basic functions of society that were meant to uphold and protect them. The negation of experience, as well as the violence and abuse encountered at police stations, was thus identified as being a source of distress at times greater than that of trauma itself. Experiences of illness and financial stress were identified as integral to the lives of sex workers. Illness was constructed as a reality that was both acknowledged and cautioned against, perhaps as a means of countering popular assumptions of sex workers' careless and irresponsible sexual conduct. Lastly, clients and client relationships were spoken of with ambivalence in their safety and ability to "save" respectively. An exclusive relationship formed with a client was at times perceived as an opportunity for individuals to leave the sex work industry and have a "normal life", and other times, was simply seen as a means of being consistently provided for by another.

4.3. MEANING

Having explored the contextual stories told by sex workers about their entry into sex work and their various experiences working, this theme presents the various interpretations and

understandings that sex workers made of their work and their experiences. It explores the mechanisms sex workers used to cope in their work to better interpret and make sense of their experiences, and includes the interpretations and comforts gained from perceptions of sex work; dissociation; forgiveness; community; education; and God and spirituality.

4.3.1. Perceptions of sex work

It has been previously mentioned that sex workers generally communicated a negative perspective of their first sex work experience. The theme, *perceptions of sex work*, includes the general views and opinions individuals communicated with regards to sex work as a whole and their experiences working. Three perceptions, although not entirely mutually exclusive, are presented within this theme and explored in terms of how they aided individuals in coping in their work and coming to terms with their presence in the industry. They include the difficulty of sex work; enjoyment of sex work; and seeing sex work as a “way of living”.

4.3.1.1. The difficulty of sex work

“It’s very difficult my dear I don’t want to lie to you, really. It’s very...it’s not really nice to be a sex worker.” (Fran)

The majority of participants communicated that sex work was difficult and undesirable as a work venture. Incidents of danger and discrimination that at times resulted in deep experiences of trauma were the main contributors of this perception. Participants emphasized the dislike of drunk and rude clients, the stress of poverty and illness, and the feelings of depression and anxiety that ensued as a result of working and fearing that they would be seen by family and friends. Individuals emphasized that they were only working to make ends meet and provide for their dependents, and entering sex work was at times constructed as a life that was far from the ideal they had envisioned growing up:

I wasn’t brought up like that. I wasn’t brought up to sleep outside...I wasn’t brought up like that. And, to be honest with you Joni, I won’t suggest that any of my friends or whoever to do sex work because I can tell you it’s not a life. (Leandre)

It was found that the difficulty of sex work translated into a sense of depression, anxiety, guilt and shame for a number of participants. Depression was related to the negative events and

difficulty of circumstances experienced by individuals, while the anxiety and guilt experienced whilst working resulted in feelings of distrust and shame, and enabled a life of secrecy. Experiences of depression and low self-esteem amongst sex workers have been reported in studies such as Chesney-Lind and Rodriguez (1983), Chudakov et al. (2002), Pyett and Warr (1999) and Wojcicki and Malala (2001). A sense of depression was characteristically associated with a lack of power and choice for participants. This finding corresponded to those of Wojcicki and Malala (2001, p. 107), who noted that “psychological problems” associated with feelings of powerlessness and having no choice but to continue in sex work (due to reasons such as technical/educational inexperience, economic dependence, and abusive family members or boyfriends) were prevalent amongst their study’s participants. Similarly, as a result of feeling like they were not able to find alternative work, participants in this study communicated a sense of entrapment, powerlessness, and depression. While they indicated a desire to stop working, or at least to take a break from sex work for a while, they constructed their position as one where they were financially tied to the work as a result of hand-to-mouth living and having to support their dependents.

As a result of feelings of anxiety in sex work and fears that they may be exposed, individuals communicated that they were continually exercising vigilance and suspicious regard of others as well as distrusting those in their lives. Pyett and Warr (1999, p. 164) termed the suspicious regard of others and vigilance exercised by sex workers as “active risk management”, the techniques and processes involved in maintaining survival and safety in sex work. It involved similar processes to those reported by participants in this study (to be covered in greater detail within the sub theme *Sex work is a “way of living”*), such as the reliance upon instinct, specific selection of clients, and reliance upon the network of sex workers to work together and keep each other safe. The authors note however, that while “active risk management” served to protect sex workers from danger, it was also a source of stress for individuals, who were exercising constant vigilance and suspicious regard of those around them. This was demonstrated in the reports of distrust communicated by the sex workers in this study: as a result of sex work, participants communicated difficulties with trusting others and building close interpersonal relationships. At times, feelings of anxiety, guilt, and distrust translated into the desire to please and withdraw from family and friends, as well as enable suspicious regard of other sex workers:

“It make(s) me feel guilty...when I’m at home I don’t know what to do I clean the house when I’m at home. I feel guilty what I do.” (Bhavani)

“I don’t trust all of them” and, “I’m (a) secret people, I don’t like to talk with everybody. If I talk with one person I feel okay, not all of them.” (Gilly)

Other times, distrust translated into a suspicious regard of men and the inability to form romantic relationships. A number of participants communicated that their distrust was informed by their partners’ infidelity and unsafe sexual behaviour that had resulted in their being infected with HIV, and was at other times related to their partners’ abusive and controlling behaviours. For these individuals, men were not to be trusted and were to be regarded only in terms of the business they would provide:

“I(‘ve) met people but I don’t trust anybody now, I don’t trust anybody now, it’s rather, at least if we talk, we talk about business and then it’s finish(ed)”. (Kathy)

The difficulty of sex work, therefore, included participants’ perceptions of their experiences and sex work as a whole. Sex work was spoken of as difficult in terms of the lifestyle it exposed individuals to (addressed at different points in the study): it was fraught with experiences of danger, violence and threat; it ‘trapped’ individuals into a cycle of economic dependence, meeting immediate expenses yet not providing consistent financial support; it inspired personal and sexual compromise, the result of desperate financial need and a means to deter potentially violent clients; and led to high levels of anxiety, distrust and guilt that further isolated participants from the individuals around them.

Sex work was perceived to be particularly difficult and expressed with negativity when it was related to a sense of powerlessness felt by participants. While Lucas (2005, p. 523) maintained that participants in her study “view(ed) sex work not as a last-ditch alternative to destitution, but as a preferred choice”, this did not correspond to my findings^{xv}. According to the reports communicated by the participants in this study, entry and presence in the industry were largely constructed from a perspective lacking power and choice:

“The first day I came to (be) the sex worker, I didn’t, it’s not my choice. But my situation made me do that.” (Marian)

This finding is supported by Stadler and Delany (2006), who reported that the women in their study (brothel-based female sex workers in Hillbrow, Johannesburg) framed their presence in the industry from a perspective of constraint, asserting that they had not chosen to become sex workers. They write, “None of the women we spoke to had intended to enter sex work; rather they claimed to have been tricked into doing so” (Stadler & Delany, 2006, p. 454). One can question the narrative intent behind framing one’s presence in the industry from a position lacking power and choice. The authors proposed that individuals framed their presence in the industry from a perspective of constraint because, in doing so, they denied taking responsibility for the identity and stigma associated with being a sex worker. They write:

Such narratives distracted attention from a personal role in the decision to enter sex work and displaced the blame and stigma associated with sex work. The emphasis on trickery obfuscates individual agency

(Stadler & Delany, 2006, p. 455).

Feelings of powerlessness were related to a sense of being financially tied to continuing in sex work; a lack of power or control in the sex work encounter (which may have escalated into a situation where the individual had been violated); and having one’s experiences of violence or trauma negated by those in authority. These experiences may have resulted in feelings of depression and anxiety, which further supported feelings of difficulty and hardship in sex work.

4.3.1.2. Enjoyment of sex work

“If I have money and buy food and clothes for my kids, I feel comfortable. But if I don’t have nothing I’m not getting right” (Gilly)

While individuals generally spoke about the difficulty of sex work and their involvement in the industry, they communicated that earning money and being able to provide for themselves and their dependents, as well as being able to earn more money sooner than they would have been able to in other forms of work, was the motivating factor behind staying in sex work. Being treated well and accepted by clients was furthermore instrumental in the reports of enjoyment in sex work.

It was previously discussed that participants experienced competition and rejection when clients exercised social and racial preference in selecting sex workers. This was a source of insecurity and stress for older women who struggled to find work in their older age. Contrasted to competition and rejection, however, was that of acceptance and preference, experienced by participants when they *were* selected and ‘chosen’. It was this feeling of acceptance and preference, as well as that of being provided for and treated well by clients, that allowed for the enjoyment of sex work for a number of individuals:

And you see, why people become addicted to sex work as well, besides the money, the clients treat you, they treat you so nicely...they actually treat you better than your own, if you're coloured and you've got a boyfriend, they treat you better than your boyfriend.
(Clarissa)

Individuals enjoyed sex work when it provided them with the money they needed to survive. Enjoyment was at times related to the role sex work provided individuals and the acceptance and preference felt when clients ‘chose’ them and treated them well. Sex work was also enjoyed when it provided individuals with the lifestyles (the material benefits, luxuries, and opportunities to see new places) they may not have otherwise had. In contrast to the difficulty of sex work, enjoyment of sex work was perhaps determined to the largest degree by whether the individual felt a sense of power in her presence in the industry and the decisions she made whilst working. It was interesting to note that while individuals may have constructed their presence in the industry from one of powerlessness and constraint, they demonstrated active decisions of power and agency in bettering their circumstances and responding to feelings of powerlessness. Entry into sex work was at times constructed as a significant exercise of power that individuals made in order to better their circumstances and eliminate feelings of powerlessness because it involved an active decision on the part of the individual to exercise agency in circumstantial constraint.

It was often in the climate of powerlessness that individuals spoke about how they had attempted to regain power and exercise authority. The ‘running-away’ patterns that characterised Bhavani’s narrative clearly illustrate this. In response to a sense that she was losing power or independence, Bhavani would run away from her “sugar daddy” because she “could not handle” the feelings of powerlessness and dependence on another for her livelihood. Clarissa similarly illustrated the intersection between power and powerlessness in

her narrative. She told me about the power that she was stripped of when she was raped as a child, and then began to tell me, unprompted, about the ways in which she asserted power over her clients in the sex work encounter. The following extract illustrates this:

You see the thing is this, when you('re) raped...everything's taken away from you, your dignity, your life, everything has been broken in you. And I'm still broken. Then, your power's taken away, now for me personally, you know that guy, he wants you, right? And as a sex worker he's gonna pay you and there's no attachments, that you know (emphasized)...you have the power. (Clarissa)

Participants exercised power through the decisions they made, often in relation to the logistics of the sex work encounter and in their conduct whilst working. They may have demonstrated choice and volition in deciding not to drink or take drugs, and whether to work indoors in the brothel-context or outdoors on the street/truck-stop. For individuals working outdoors, the street was chosen as a means of taking an active role in gaining the business of clients and not being subjected to the selection process characterising indoor sex work^{xvi}. This observation is supported by the findings of Wojcicki and Malala (2001, p. 101), who spoke about the ways in which individuals exercised power and agency through the “micro decision-making” they utilised in sex work. They maintained that although individuals typically framed their presence in sex work from a perspective of powerlessness, they exercised choice and control on a micro level. Choice and power (through agency) was exercised by individuals both in the macro decision to enter sex work in order to provide for their families, and on a micro level when individuals made choices regarding client preference, location of work, sex work conduct, and safety precautions. The authors recognise these processes as important to the demonstration of power and acting, and assert that while individuals may view their position in sex work from one of constraint, they are making micro choices that assert their agency to some degree.

Exercising power, in the form of asserting boundaries in a client relationship, was also described as a way that some sex workers exercised power and maintained control. An active choice was made to keep ones private and public lives separate, and know as little about the client's private life as possible:

“We’ve almost known each other for one year, and I don’t know anything about his life. And I choose it that way.” (Anna)

Lastly, it was asserted that power was achieved through charging men for sex. Lucas (2005, p. 520) cites the words of a “prostitutes’ rights activist”, who maintained that through charging men for sex, women are empowered because they are receiving financial benefit from an act they are socially expected to provide. She asserts, “For some women to get paid for what all women are expected to do for free is a source of power for all women to refuse *any free sex*” (Lopez-Jones, 1998, cited in Lucas, 2005, p. 520). This view was certainly communicated by Clarissa, in her assertion that she knew her sexuality was desired and she held the power in determining whether she would offer a client her services and how much he would have to pay in order to have his desire satisfied.

Enjoyment of sex work, therefore, was not only determined by positive experiences, client acceptance, and a better lifestyle, but was largely determined by the degree to which individuals felt they exercised power and control in, firstly, deciding to enter sex work, and secondly, in the micro logistical decisions required for survival. For these individuals, sex work, while not ideal, was at times highlighted as enjoyable and framed from a more positive view than individuals who emphasized the difficulty and dislike of the work.

4.3.1.3. Sex work is a “way of living”

“Although I was scared, I was trying to tell myself that this is a way of living, you know it’s a job, and it all depends on me if I’m going to make it or not.” (Anna)

Through seeing sex work as “a way of living” and a job with its respective code of conduct and recommended processes, participants were able to endure and make sense of their experiences and presence within the industry. This meant that individuals played an active role in seeing sex as a form of work and something they needed to partake in to survive, ensuring they made the correct decisions with regard to how they conducted themselves and ascertained their safety.

The construction of sex work as a “way of living” was largely informed by the ways in which individuals perceived it; whether they saw sex work as a means to an end or whether they perceived sex work in a positive or negative light. Through seeing sex work from a

perspective of negativity and no choice, and embracing the difficulties encountered on the road, individuals were able to endure their work and get through adverse experiences, but demonstrated a sense of hopelessness and depression. For individuals such as Clarissa and Izzy, coping was achieved through the use of imagination and fantasy. Izzy mentioned that while she did not enjoy sex work, she was able to continue working by seeing it as something she needed to do and imagining that there was “nothing bad happening” to her. While she framed her perception of sex work from a negative perspective that helped her to continue working in the industry, she communicated a day-to-day living approach that resented her necessity to work. This was somewhat different to the position communicated by Clarissa. While Clarissa’s message supported the notion of day-to-day living and seeing sex work as a means to an end, it differed in the perspective from which it was framed. While Izzy’s message communicated a sense of passivity, Clarissa communicated one of activity. Clarissa would imagine that she held power over her client and this would give her strength. She also maintained that positivity was important in attracting good business, treatment, and experiences with clients, and asserted that having a negative perception of oneself and the work would not be conducive to attracting clients and making money. I asked her whether she had always been positive and she replied that she had because there was “no other way to be”.

As a “way of living”, sex work was constructed as a job with a particular and correct code of conduct. Clarissa outlined a particular code of conduct that the ‘old’ sex workers used to follow. According to this code, the sex worker maintained *secrecy* between herself and her client; *respect* in the way she spoke to her client and was treated by him (she added here that the sex worker ought not to go with the client if he did not respect her); and was not to steal from her client. Clarissa also spoke about the requirements that sex workers needed to meet in order to fulfil the code, identifying characteristics such as having “nice manners”, being “sophisticated”, “well-dressed”, “well groomed”, and “neat and clean”. In outlining this code of conduct, Clarissa portrayed sex work as a form of work that was both respectable and professional in its nature. This code of conduct also served to distinguish between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ forms of sex work and ‘good’ and ‘bad’ sex workers, a theme which will be looked at in more detail in the following sub theme of *dissociation*.

As previously discussed, “active risk management” was an integral part to the lifestyle of sex work and to the code of conduct. At times participants described the necessity to rely upon

their instinct or “senses” in order to protect themselves from danger and cope in a risky work environment. The client’s “profile” informed the judgments made about whether a client was a potential risk or not, as well as the general “sense” the individual had about a particular client or sexual transaction. Intuition was highlighted as an essential tool for maintaining safety in sex work:

...sex workers are experts on body language, intuition, they're very very good at sizing people up...that's a skill you develop over the years but it's basically using your...intuition that you have already, but we depend, sex workers depend greatly on non-verbal communication, you have to be an expert on that otherwise you die. Literally. (Clarissa)

The use of instinct or intuition as a coping mechanism has been discussed by authors such as Barnard (1993), Fick (2005), Katz (2001), and Pyett and Warr (1999). Barnard (1993, p. 692) wrote:

Some women would base their judgement on the type of car the client drove; men in old or cheap cars were often exemplified as possibly untrustworthy. The women appear to watch their clients carefully, constantly assessing their behaviour and mannerisms. Women reported being uncomfortable with men who did not talk to them when they were in the car.

Intuition was informed by the judgments sex workers made about the perceived threat of a client. Clarissa identified certain characteristics of the client that deemed him either safe or unsafe. She spoke about his “non-verbal communication”, which included the ways in which the client spoke to the sex worker, and the tone of voice he used, and mentioned that she would not go with a client who had shouted at her in getting her attention. Judgments were also largely informed by a degree of prejudice and stereotyping exercised by a number of sex workers in relation to the client’s particular social and racial grouping, which may have been the result of having had bad experiences with clients/police who represented certain groupings. Participants described the characteristics of clients they regarded as dangerous or risky, including clients fitting the “American profile” and those who were “coloured”, as well as those they regarded as safe and honest such as clients who were older and not wealthy.

“Well we only know the American profile: he’s a white guy, under 30, that’s got a smart car, and he’s smooth and he’s nice, the young guy.” (Clarissa)

In demonstrating prejudice and processes of judging, participants may have constructed themselves as active agents who made selective choices regarding the types of clients they would solicit, and may have reframed and reinterpreted experiences of prejudice and discrimination in a way that portrayed them as active actors in the industry rather than victims. For example, while it was acknowledged that being a sex worker was not easy, experiences of prejudice and discrimination were constructed by Anna as being character-building and necessary for her to feel more “human”. She constructed her experiences of sex work, including those of prejudice and discrimination, as conditions that she had chosen and accepted. This narrative stood in stark contrast with other narratives that also highlighted the problem of prejudice and discrimination in sex work, yet did not interpret these conditions as beneficial in the lifestyle of sex work.

For the participants cited in this sub theme, seeing sex work as a “way of living” was a way in which continued working was enabled, and coping in adverse and damaging circumstances was made possible. Seeing sex work as a job with its own code of conduct was also a way in which individuals made sense of their work and the identity embedded within its role. Instinct, informed by judgments influenced by prejudice and stereotyping, was used by sex workers to maintain safety in their work. Experiences of prejudice and discrimination were also at times embraced as part of sex work and counted as valuable in terms of the growth they brought.

In reviewing reported perceptions of sex work, it appeared that there was ambiguity in the way a number of individuals commented on, reflected, and explained their thoughts and experiences of sex work. On more than one occasion Clarissa stated that “sex work is actually very dangerous”, even though she initially asserted that sex workers are not exploited as much as it is argued. Portia seemed to communicate a conflict between her support of sex work and her dislike of it, while Leandre similarly communicated an ambiguous perception of sex work, in that while she initially asserted that she loved her job and her life, she later said that sex work “is not a life”.

This demonstrates the complexity in the interactions between power and powerlessness and

choice and constraint in the perceptions and experiences of sex workers in their work, where decisions and actions were not made and exercised from one particular perspective or place in its entirety. The intersection between the difficulty of sex work and the enjoyment of sex work (and by extension, the intersection between expressions of power and powerlessness) is illustrated in the third perception of sex work, as being a “way of living”, informed by both negative and positive perceptions of sex work. It also appeared that political and social agendas were at times influential in the way that individuals spoke about and portrayed their experiences and perceptions of sex work. There was a strong message conveyed about the importance of seeing sex work as a job; sex work as desirable; and entry into sex work as unrelated to a past of abuse. However, as argued earlier, these messages were often conveyed with ambivalence. It is important to consider the contexts in which these messages were conveyed: in light of the criminalisation/decriminalisation debates characterising the present South African climate, it is possible that individuals communicated a certain message that would further their interests in the decriminalisation of sex work and protection of their legal and human rights to earn money working as a sex worker, and be able to report the violence and discrimination exercised by clients and police, respectively. The affiliation that a number of sex workers had to a sex work organisation (that supports the decriminalisation of sex work), may also have influenced the message they communicated.

The way that individuals perceived their work, whether in a positive, negative, or realistic light, enabled understanding and coping in sex work. It is important to acknowledge that my presence in the study may have also influenced the ways in which individuals spoke about their work and framed their presence in the industry. Individuals may have perceived me as a potential threat (to the political/social movement to decriminalise sex work), or as judgmental of their work and identity as a sex worker. They may therefore have come across as particularly supportive of sex work and their identity as a sex worker, or as particularly powerless and constrained in being a sex worker.

In assessing perceptions of sex work, it appeared that through perceiving sex work negatively and from a perspective of powerlessness, individuals may have reduced feelings of guilt associated with their role of sex worker and the responsibility they had played in entering the industry. This perception however, was associated with a sense of depression in their work and hopelessness about the future. Individuals who perceived sex work more positively and highlighted the various aspects that made it enjoyable, may have used the small decisions of

power and choice to present themselves as active agents and so reduce the anxiety and depression associated with their experiences, or present sex work in a light that countered notions of it being an unpleasant vocation. This perception was presented in a way that helped the individual to feel more in control of her circumstances and therefore more positive about her life and her future. Finally, through perceiving sex work as a way of living, individuals communicated a more neutral understanding of their work and their presence within the industry. They demonstrated a more practical (whether in part positive or negative) understanding of their work, using such understanding to motivate them to see sex work as a way of living and continue in the industry. The use of survival mechanisms (such as intuition) was integral to this perspective. In assessing the effectiveness of intuition as a survival mechanism, Pyett and Warr (1999) stressed that although intuition was used by sex workers as a means of protecting themselves from potentially dangerous clients and contexts, it did not make sex workers immune from the compromises that were made when they were lacking in self confidence, financial security, or were under the influence of drugs. The authors maintained that those most at risk to danger were young women who were passive to the pursuits of control made by clients, and those who relied heavily upon their own abilities to actively judge and intuit a situation. They concluded that instinct alone was neither “reliable nor sufficient” (Pyett & Warr, 1999, p. 166) in offering protection to the sex worker. In accordance with the literature, it follows that instinct would have served as a poor coping mechanism where the individual was not experienced, confident, and in a place where she would refuse to compromise. Owing to the levels of low self-esteem, high financial desperation, and questionable levels of compromise amongst participants, one can only conclude that reliance upon instinct alone was not an effective coping mechanism.

On a deeper and more specific level, coping in sex work (including specific experiences of trauma) was achieved through internal processes of dissociation and forgiveness, and through communal and interpersonal supports of community, education, and religion.

4.3.2. Dissociation

“I just tell myself, ‘let me do this, let me be here.’ I just pretend there’s nothing bad happening to me. (Izzy)

The experience of trauma was discussed in the theme of *danger and discrimination*. It was mentioned that as an overwhelming and foreign experience, trauma is not easily integrated

into the individual's self-concept and life narrative, and is therefore dealt with by a number of psychological processes. 'Splitting' or 'dissociation' is a defense mechanism utilised by the psyche to protect it from realizing a damaging and harmful experience that would threaten the individual's sense of self (Rose, 1999). It allows for the splitting or doubling of the self into a part that experiences the trauma and a part that, figuratively speaking, does not, and enables individuals to feel a sense of temporary transcendence in traumatic experiences that enables them to survive (Delbo, 1990; Langer, 1991; Rose, 1999). It also allows individuals to fulfil different roles and separate these roles from their sense of self in order to achieve different life requirements.

Participants communicated that dissociation in sex work was at times necessary for fulfilling the role of the sex worker and coping in adverse experiences. Dissociation was at times achieved through the use of substances and imagination, and through processes of splitting that enabled individuals to fulfil the identities of different roles. Dissociation involved not only the sense of strength achieved in working, but, through processes of splitting, created a distancing of the self from the role, identity, and stigma embedded in the sex worker construct. The theme, *dissociation*, refers not only to the psychic processes utilised by sex workers in dealing with traumatic experiences, but also includes the ways in which they were able to 'split' or 'dissociate' their selves into different personalities and identities necessary for fulfilling a number of different roles.

The fulfilling of different roles was a complex experience shared by participants. They emphasized the difficulty of fulfilling public and private roles and living two different lives. Publicly they were the mothers, sisters, daughters, and aunts in their communities, while privately they fulfilled the role of the 'sex worker'. Participants communicated that it was necessary to keep the "home life" (public) and the "work life" (private) separate. Consider the following quotation, which juxtaposes these two roles:

So we('re) always living this double life. Like when you come home you buy groceries, you('ve) got your Shoprite bag, and I got my scarf on my head and, I don't dress like a sex worker, I dress like a lady that's going shopping. (Clarissa)

In light of the quote above, it would appear that there was an awareness of what a 'sex worker' and a 'lady' looked like, and it was interesting to see how participants identified with

their alternate roles such as those of ‘sex worker’, ‘prostitute’ and ‘whore’, and their roles of ‘lady’ and ‘mother’. For example, Anna described how she had dressed like a “whore” on the first night she worked as a sex worker, saying:

“When I started out my first night, I had my long black boots on, my fishnet stockings, my pvc skirt, and like all that kind of whore stuff”. (Anna)

There seemed to be an awareness and acting out of the stereotypical constructs of the sex worker, in terms of what she looked like and how she behaved, and while there was evidence to support an affiliation with the role of ‘sex worker’, there was also a degree of guilt and shame associated with this role. Tension was typically observed at the intersection of the two roles. While individuals may have demonstrated comfort with each alternative role, discomfort was evident when these two roles intersected and the individual was at risk to exposure. It was observed that tension produced in the fulfilling of different roles was dealt with by an almost doubling or splitting of the self that enabled individuals to participate in both private and public spheres.

“You’ve got two distinct personalities. One at home you(‘re) a mother, and you’re loving and do homework with your kids and all that. And then the other life when you are working” (Clarissa)

“When I was on the road I was this cheeky, rude...I was this brave brave person. At home I was just a softy.” (Anna)

While the doubling or splitting of the self enabled individuals to embody a different persona that was perhaps ‘braver’ or more assertive than usual, it came to negatively impact individuals when practiced for an enduring amount of time. Clarissa argued that sex workers turned to alcohol and drugs in order to meet the requirements of fulfilling separate roles because “it eventually affects you.” This is supported by theoretical findings. Dissociation achieves a sense of “temporary transcendence” (Rose, 1999, p .167) and may allow for individuals to have an almost ‘out of body’ experience of their trauma or assist them in fulfilling a number of necessary roles. However, while dissociation may help individuals survive horrific events in achieving a sense of separation, it also serves to numb the individual from the emotions of the trauma, which, when arising afterwards, may create in

individuals a deep sense of guilt, shame and horror. Individuals may numb themselves to their emotions and thoughts and demonstrate a form of acting, where they employ a different personality and use their imagination to fulfil the requirements of a certain role.

Your job is to be happy. No matter how you feel inside so, you teach yourself to have like discipline emotionally...So you always have this, you actually just learn just to project a nice side of you and your life as wonderful. (Clarissa)

The use of substances provided individuals with the ability to imagine a certain power and strength over their clients in the sexual encounter. It gave them a sense of distance from their clients and enabled them to assert boundaries they may not have been able to assert otherwise. Fick (2005, p. 39) mentioned that sex workers would use substances to relax and she quotes, “to take themselves out of their body”. Fick (2005) also cites authors such as Romero-Daza, Weeks and Singer (2005), who maintained that sex workers would use substances in order to increase their self-confidence and reduce their guilt associated with working. This was illustrated through the reports of some of the participants in this study, who spoke about how the use of drugs and alcohol helped them to cope better in sex work.

“Sometimes you, you decide to do drugs because drugs makes me, I don’t know, make you, what feel. Because when you normal you can’t tolerate it.” (Marian)

While individuals used imagination and substances to help them fulfil different roles and achieve a sense of separation in their work, dissociation was perhaps most effective when individuals differentiated between different types of sex work, and associated themselves with more positive and respectable forms of sex work conduct. Through esteeming one’s various roles, individuals were able to deal with the mental and moral conflicts that fulfilling different roles produced. Fran (quoted below) asserted on a number of occasions that her role as a sex worker did not correlate with who she was in the community. Her message communicated the idea that one might not perceive a sex worker to be someone who is loved and respected, and shows love towards others, and this was a point she may have felt necessary for me, as someone who possibly held this opinion, to hear.

I love my children, not only my children I love children, even when you can, if you can go where I stay, you cannot believe I’m a sex worker because people there respect me and

then see the children love me. (Fran)

In addition to the esteeming of one's various roles was the identification and criticism of the 'other' as a means of maintaining distance from the traditional sex worker construct. Kathy and Clarissa both emphasized the work of sex work and the professional practices of their work. Clarissa spoke about an established respectability, a "code of conduct" that distinguished "new" sex work from "old" sex work, saying, for example:

Because the old sex workers they were like more mature, and you know sort of, like nowadays the girls seem to be very loskop to me. They don't do their work properly and they don't dress properly, they don't act properly. So it's, it's actually a very big difference between when I started and now.

As previously argued, research has supported findings of a particular code of conduct in sex work and a distancing of the self from the 'other', the 'good' from the 'bad' sex worker. Katz (2001, p. 42) spoke about how sex workers distinguished between "acceptable and unacceptable sexual practices", and how individuals who engaged in unacceptable sexual practices were judged because they contributed to the negative perception of sex work. Often the self-protective measures utilised by sex workers in securing their personal identities was through the criticism and judgment of younger sex workers who were involved with gangs and/or drugs and alcohol, and who lowered the 'standard' of sex work. Substance-using sex workers and foreign sex workers were identified as being representative of 'bad' or unacceptable sexual practices because of their alleged lack of cleanliness, unsafe sexual practices and conduct, in lowering the prices of sexual services and the standard of sex work for all those working in the industry (Maher, 1997; Stadler & Delany, 2006).

In differentiating between 'good' and 'bad' forms of sex work practice, individuals maintained a sense of separation from the traditional sex worker construct through establishing a form of respectability in their work. The issue of 'respectability' is one that is also mentioned by Campbell et al. (1998) and Campbell (1999) (as cited in Wojcicki & Malala, 2001). In their study that explored the obstacles to condom use within the mining town of Carletonville just outside of Johannesburg, Campbell et al. (1998) found that the normative socio-cultural values within the community were such that a woman's respectability was tied to her social roles of "wife, home-maker and mother, roles which were

characterized by sexual fidelity and sobriety” (Campbell et al., 1998, p. 52). Commercial sex workers working in the mining town were thus experiencing low levels of respect and self-respect, and were experiencing high levels of abuse and discrimination from clients because they had forsaken the roles that earned them respectability. The authors later spoke about the ways in which sex workers dealt with this loss of respectability and identified behaviours exercised by sex workers, such as denying the nature of their work and framing their presence within the sex work industry from a perspective of powerlessness and victimhood, as means of making their decisions more socially acceptable.

In summary, dissociation in sex work included the psychological process of splitting that was required for individuals to cope with traumatic experiences and meet the requirements of fulfilling different roles. It was at times achieved through the use of imagination and acting, and at times supplemented with the use of substances in order to bring about the strength and power to get through difficult experiences and successfully fulfil the sex worker role.

In reviewing dissociation as a coping mechanism in sex work, it appeared that psychological processes of splitting were relatively effective in helping individuals achieve a sense of temporary transcendence in their experiences and the requirements of fulfilling a number of different roles. This was aided by the use of substances when the playing of different roles was reported to have affected the individual. However the use of substances has been considered a dangerous coping mechanism utilised by sex workers because it exposes them to increased vulnerability to violence and abuse in impairing their vigilance to danger, and enables sexual compromise (Brener & Pauw, 1998). While dissociation was effective in helping individuals separate their selves from their working selves and maintain a sense of respectability or distance in their work, it was both harmful in the numbing effect it induced and in the tools it employed to help bring about distance (such as the use of substances).

4.3.3. Forgiveness

“I don’t care what she did to me the time I was young, I don’t care. Now I know how...to find money. I do my best to find something.” (Odelle)

Marian was approached by a client and offered R500 to provide her sexual services. After the sexual encounter, she was driven to a dark and remote location where the client locked the car doors and told her to give him his money back. She obliged and the client told her to

“fokoff in (his) car”. Two weeks later the same client approached her. He did not recognise her at first, but when she told him that she knew who he was, he apologized to her. He told her that he had been angry that day because he had been previously robbed by another sex worker. He had decided that he would pick up the “next girl”, receive her sexual services, and then leave her. Marian happened to be that “next girl”. After expressing to the client that she felt he had punished her for what another sex worker had done, the client apologized and offered to pay Marian for her services that day. She forgave him and concluded her story by telling me that he has now become her “best client”, providing her with money and groceries when she is in need, and making contact with her when he requires her sexual services.

Stories such as this were not uncommon: participants frequently reported occasions where clients demanded their money back and refused to pay for sexual services after they had been received, or dropped them in remote locations. Yet narratives of forgiveness were rarely told. For some participants, forgiveness enabled the healing and understanding needed to cope and come to terms with damaging events experienced in childhood and whilst working in the sex work industry. Kathy and Odelle mentioned, respectively, that they had forgiven their fathers for an abusive past and for not providing the protection from an abusive stepmother. Kathy communicated that through forgiveness, she was able to release the hurt from being abused by her father, and Odelle was able to provide for her father in his need, in spite of his neglect to provide for her in the past.

According to the literature on subjects of trauma and forgiveness, it is this “release” of hurt and resentment that provides the impetus for healing and reconciliation for those who have hurt and been hurt by others. Gobodo-Madikizela (2008) maintains that deep hurt and pain are released when individuals are able to connect with one another on an empathic level. It is argued that the humanity of individuals is restored when the trauma of the victim and perpetrator (in coming to terms with his/her atrocities), is acknowledged by the other and they are able to relate to one another on an empathic level. Gobodo-Madikizela (2008, p. 178) writes: “The exercise of witnessing and bearing witness about trauma creates the possibility for the restoration of these empathic bonds with others, even those who are our former enemies.”

Kathy’s father had been sick, and before he died, her mother made contact with Kathy and implored her to go and see him. When Kathy saw her father and he asked her to forgive him

for his abuse during her childhood, she forgave him. It was her father's acknowledgement of the hurt he had caused her, of her trauma, that was instrumental in Kathy's forgiving of him. Being acknowledged, being seen, and bearing witness to each other's trauma enabled the processes of forgiveness and healing that ensued. It was for this reason then, that while Kathy was able to forgive her father, she was unable to forgive her mother. Her mother had been aware of the abuse but had denied it, and by extension, Kathy's trauma in the experiencing of it. She said:

My father ask for forgiveness from me, I forgive him but I didn't forgive my mother because she didn't believe me, see? Because she... thought I was creating stories. You see because she thought I was creating stories. You see?

The nature and condition of forgiveness, itself, has been debated. One may question whether forgiveness is only achieved when it has been asked for, or whether it is possible to forgive when it has been neither asked for nor desired. Gobodo-Madikizela (2008, p. 172) summarises Derrida's (2002) postulation in saying that "the essence of forgiveness is in forgiving the unforgivable: forgiveness acquires its true meaning only when it is called upon to forgive the unforgivable." In light of this statement, there can be no limit or distinction between what is forgivable and what is not, because in essence, forgiveness is simply the releasing of a transgression or debt that may extend beyond reason or logic. It has been suggested by Gobodo- Madikizela (2008), then, that *empathy* is the ingredient that lies at the heart of forgiveness: forgiveness is not dependent or limited by the deed that is to be forgiven; rather, it is through the individual's ability to empathize with their persecutor and relate to that individual's humanity that allows for possibilities of forgiveness.

In denying the abuse she experienced in her childhood, Kathy's mother did not allow Kathy the opportunity to testify about her experiences and relate to her mother on an empathic level. Forgiveness was then constructed as impossible for Kathy. However, while empathy stood as the grounds on which Kathy forgave her father, it was not always the condition on which forgiveness was achieved. Perhaps this is why Odelle's story was highlighted as so significant. While Odelle did not specifically speak about the 'forgiveness' of her father or stepmother per se, her actions demonstrated a sense of forgiveness in the clarity with which she saw the need to provide for her father. She communicated that it was a simple matter of necessity to provide money so that her father could eat, that inspired her forgiveness of him

and the release of hurt and resentment felt towards her stepmother. She asserted that being able to provide for herself inspired the ability to release the experiences of the past and move forward, as illustrated in the quote introducing the present sub theme.

Forgiveness as a personal response to trauma provided individuals with the ability to understand and cope better in their lives and experiences of sex work. It was made possible when avenues of empathy opened and individuals connected on an interpersonal level with those who had hurt them. Forgiveness thus stands on the periphery of an internal and interpersonal boundary, and emphasizes the role of community and interpersonal witnessing of trauma and experience, in the working through of hurt and coping in sex work.

4.3.4. Community

“I feel okay when I go to my friends and talk with my friends” (Gilly).

The majority of participants asserted that they were able to find meaning and deal better with negative events when they shared their experiences, advice and thoughts with others in the sex work community. This sharing of information served on a practical level, where individuals passed on valuable knowledge and advice about dangerous clients and how to protect oneself from harm, and on a more meaningful level where individuals shared their personal hurts and experiences gained whilst working.

Clarissa described a close-knit community of sex workers, where information and advice was passed from one individual to the next. This helped sex workers to protect themselves from danger because reports of danger and violence were presently spread through the network of sex workers, and individuals were warned about a certain client. She said:

But you see... if a guy does that (does not pay for sex) in (location)...like the next hour in (location) will know. Because we've got that network all the time. So it's actually safe in the sense of having a network...we know that guy, don't go with him he's a dropper, he's gonna drop you.

Participants spoke about the strategies sex workers used in order to protect themselves. In addition to asserting themselves in making personal choices relating to the logistics of the sex work encounter (location, type of services offered, prices of services, “profile” of clients),

participants spoke about the need to rely on each other in remembering the registration numbers and appearance of clients, and the passing on valuable knowledge and advice. Other studies have found that individuals also leave earnings with other sex workers whilst they continue working, work in groups or pairs, and work under the protection of a pimp (Fick, 2005; Hartley, 2005; Katz, 2001). This provides individuals with the support and protection they would not ordinarily have working on their own.

It was interesting to note that while a large degree of conflict and competition was observed in both Stadler and Delany's (2006) and Wojcicki and Malala's (2001) studies, a sense of community and protection between sex workers was also described. Older women often passed on valuable advice and guidance to younger sex workers entering the industry as to how much they should charge for sexual services, the importance of demanding condom use, and how they could judge whether a client was 'safe' or not. A similar account of community and protection of younger sex workers was provided by the older participants in this study. Fran, for example, described seeing young girls around the ages of fifteen and sixteen on the road whom she felt an affinity towards and desire to protect because she had daughters of her own. She said that it was difficult because while she wanted to help them, she regarded them with scepticism because of negative experiences she had in helping them in the past. She said:

"You don't know how to help these children. And then the thing (is), you want to help them but...they are rude because they use drugs and they do drinking."

Being able to bring aspects of the secret life into the light was identified as bringing comfort to individuals because it helped them to feel less alone and burdened. Fran explained that being alone was the most difficult time for her because she often felt like it was "too much" when she reflected upon her experiences. She said that talking to others made her feel better in the sense that she often heard stories worse than her own and was then comforted by her own experiences. In this community she has been able to share her experiences and perceptions of sex work and gain those of others. This can be acknowledged as an important component to the working through of negative experiences and coping in sex work because, as argued by Pyett and Warr (1999, p. 159), "For most of the street workers, and a small number of brothel workers, daily life was characterised by profound social isolation which

was most evident in the absence of family, friends or any personal support network around them”

Experiences of trauma and illness, whilst enduring and interfering, were also easier to deal with when they were brought into the open and spoken about. As a cultural trauma shared by members of the sex worker community, illness evoked a sense of both community and fear. Individuals were drawn together in their experiences of illness as they shared their experiences of lifestyle changes, visits to the clinic, and fear of the future. Portia spoke about the community of sex workers that work at the truck stop. HIV is a uniting factor that draws the women together and encourages them to share their experiences. She described a community that shares experiences, encourages each other to seek and follow treatment, and to speak openly about their illness. This has enabled individuals to see their illness in a more positive light and view their change in lifestyle in an almost comical^{xvii} way.

Open communication and sharing of experiences was thus an important way for individuals to express and share their fears and concerns as they continued in sex work. The “network” was an important way in which the community of sex workers shared knowledge and warned each other about dangerous clients. It was comforting for individuals to share their experiences with other sex workers and was particularly comforting when they were able to share some of their secret life with their close friends and family.

4.3.5. Education

Fundamental to the act of sharing was the dissemination of knowledge gained and the educating of others. Meaning and purpose was achieved through processes of education; that of being educated and in turn educating. Education was made possible by the knowledge sex workers acquired through the programmes and out-reach initiatives of sex work organisations. Individuals gained knowledge relating to topics of safe-sex practices, streetwise conduct, substance abuse, and HIV/AIDS. It was through participants’ acquiring of knowledge that their desire to reach out to others was inspired.

An interest in education and educating others about the importance of looking after oneself and maintaining safe sex practices was a message communicated by a number of sex workers:

And I can tell you about, I can tell you that even if we are sex workers we are protect(ing) each other we are like, we are protective of our bodies because we are using condoms...we know that...we must use a condoms, and if we use condom(s), (we) can't just throw the paper whatsoever, we keep it clean, everything we keep it clean. (Kathy)

Ellie described enjoying the courses she had taken in topics such as “drugs and abuse, homebase(d) care, allowance, HIV and AIDS”. This has involved going into the community and talking to children in schools about the nature and side effects of HIV and the measures one needs to take in order to protect oneself from infection. She explained that she has also been involved in educating others about the dangers of substance abuse and thus sees the education of others as important.

In highlighting the importance of safe-sex practices and the evils of substance abuse, participants portrayed themselves as knowledgeable and informative in these areas. They portrayed themselves as wise and cautious in their sex work conduct and critical of those who were engaging in reckless sexual behaviour, thereby differentiating themselves from the traditional sex worker construct. This may have been related to the affiliation a number of sex workers had to a particular sex worker organisation that promoted safe-sex education and encouraged the education of others. Education about illness and how to prevent infection, together with the open communication and sharing of experiences in the sex work community, helped participants come to terms with their experiences and identities, and make sense of their presence in the industry. Education was perhaps also described as important because for many of these individuals, it was a luxury they had never had. The acquiring of knowledge and the technical skills gained to implement such knowledge was thus something that may have added value to their lives and their understanding and ability to cope in sex work.

4.3.6. God and spirituality

“That’s why I say ‘God loves me’, because when he see(s) I’m scared and I love my children I always say, ‘God loves me’, really. Because you see I’m still alive and then I’m healthy.” (Fran)

God was highlighted as a source of comfort to Fran through the difficulties of her past and her experiences of trauma whilst working as a sex worker. She repeatedly expressed an

acknowledgement of God's love for her and her love for children. This formed the basis of why she believed she was still alive and HIV negative, and was able to deal and cope with her experiences.

"That's why I say the other people can't take the pain, but me I can take it because I think maybe it's the children or God make me to love my children."

Yet throughout her narrative, Fran expressed a deep sense of guilt in her work and the fear that she would be found out by her family. On a number of occasions Fran mentioned that she had experienced deep guilt and shame working as a sex worker whilst coming from a family that had been "church people". The tension of this experience was highlighted as particularly difficult for her.

Katz (2001, p. 44) found that the guilt experienced and spoken about by sex workers (often in relation to "religion in narratives") was frequently "countered with the need to survive" (Katz, 2001, p. 45). She quotes a participant who said, "I feel that I have disappointed God, but what about my children? Somehow I must survive, we must eat, you need money". A similar observation was made in this study, where guilt was juxtaposed with the need to provide and survive.

"I feel guilty when I lay my head I pray, and I tell myself I don't wanna do it, but tomorrow morning it's just the same thing again." (Bhavani)

"God forgive me because I don't know where must I get food for my children?" (Fran)

In countering guilt with a need to survive, individuals reconciled their actions to their thoughts and beliefs. In these cases, framing one's presence in sex work from a perspective of constraint enabled individuals to cope with the tension associated with the moral conflict of fulfilling two different roles.

As with God, experiences with the church also brought feelings of guilt and comfort to participants. While studies (see Hartley, 2005; Leggett, 1999) have reported that church was evaded and experienced as a problem by sex workers, this did not necessarily correspond to my findings. While Fran's personal discomfort was apparent in the conflict and guilt she felt

in being a sex worker having grown in a “church house”, she reported receiving strong prayer at her church which was deeply comforting to her. Leandre similarly reported a positive experience she had at church. As a transgendered individual^{xviii}, a significant part of Leandre’s narrative recalled the struggles she had in expressing her sexuality and gender throughout her adolescent and early adulthood years. A conversion experience that called her sexuality into question was thus significant. Leandre described being “filled... with the spirit” and recalled how during the experience, she began to feel like a man for the first time. This was significant because as a transgendered individual, she had never identified with the male gender before, and described this experience as being “different” and a “great feeling”.

It appeared that while the individual may have avoided God and the church due to their feelings of guilt and anxiety associated with being a sex worker, they ultimately experienced comfort when contact was made. A similar finding was reported by Fick (2005, p. 38), who stated: “Six of the participants mentioned the church or their own personal beliefs as a potential source of strength to them. Three people mentioned that going to church or speaking to someone from the church was a source of support for them.” Meaning was made when participants attributed survival in sex work to the mercy of God and felt loved by God. The comfort gained from these experiences was seen to be integral to coping in sex work.

Coping in sex work was also achieved through the positivity and purpose learned through spirituality. Clarissa spoke about the lessons of positive thinking that she has had to learn in order to find meaning and purpose in her life, and maintained that her circumstances were largely dependent on the way she saw herself and her life events. Clarissa spoke about principles of “manifestation” and “visualization”:

You manifest what you believe what you say. Like I say today I’m gonna get three of my good clients and, doesn’t always happen but, 99.9%. You’ve gotta believe that it’s going to happen, because that I can tell you, is more than half of the job. You don’t have a positive attitude you, there’s no ways you gonna ever make money.

In addition to the sense of meaning and purpose Clarissa achieved through her beliefs, she gained comfort through the sharing of her knowledge. She constructed this process as important because she expressed the desire to help individuals on a practical level through inspiring them on a theoretical one. Her desire, through implementing principles of positivity

and spirituality, was to challenge the preconceived notions of sex work and develop a new perception of sex work and sex workers. Becoming an educated and educating sex worker, a “woman activist”, then, has become a goal for Clarissa and a purpose to strive for.

“So I mean this has been my mission: to encourage sex workers to explore the other side of their personalities, to be able to be writers to use that knowledge to earn money. Like legitimately.”

In summary then, while perceived with anxiety, a few participants identified God and the church as influential in helping them find meaning in their lives and cope in their work. Principles of spirituality and positivity were also identified as being integral to making meaning and finding comfort in sex work. At times, meaning was made when individuals attributed survival in sex work to the hand of God, and other times through attributing survival to positive projections of the self. The sharing of these lessons with other sex workers was seen to further promote meaning and coping in sex work.

The mechanisms of forgiveness, community, education, God and spirituality, were identified to be most effective in bringing about coping in sex work. Individuals reported that being in community with others who shared similar experiences was helpful in alleviating the burden of suffering and the weight of the secret life. However, this was not an easy process as the secret life evoked feelings of distrust, suspicion, and the wariness of getting too close to others and forming romantic relationships, in participants. Yet in spite of this, a number of individuals commented that it felt good to speak about their experiences with someone and that it was difficult keeping their experiences of hurt inside. They expressed feeling more comforted and able to cope with their experiences when they were able to share them with the sex worker community and, if possible, with members of their family. While forgiveness was reported to help individuals release the hurt and pain of the past and continue with their present, it was not reported to be exercised by many participants. Being educated and educating others was identified as a strong way in which individuals coped in their work, giving them a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives. Lastly, it was found that God and principles of spirituality were important in helping individuals finding meaning in their lives and hope for the future.

Having explored and assessed the various meanings and coping mechanisms utilised by sex workers in understanding and dealing with their presence and experiences in the sex work industry, it is clear that coping mechanisms that draw individuals into community with others are most effective and beneficial for those burdened by experiences of isolation, depression, and trauma in their work. In addition, as argued by Chudakov et al. (2002, p. 314):

It is critical to make social services including counseling available to such women both to reduce mental health burden in those suffering PTSD [Post-traumatic Stress Disorder] or depression and to inform them of their rights to leave prostitution and obtain alternative employment.

CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study sought to explore the ways in which sex workers narrated their stories of entry, experience, and meaning in sex work in order to gain a better understanding of how sex workers perceive their work and frame their presence in the sex work industry. It was particularly interested in the ways in which these stories incorporated expressions of choice and constraint, and whether these paradigms were adequate in representing the reality of women's lives. It sought to provide sex workers with the opportunity to voice their own experiences and thoughts on sex work, and contribute towards knowledge of sex work contained outside of numerical interpretations. It employed a narrative approach to data collection in order to allow individuals the freedom to bring their own information to the interview setting, and so allow for the gap between the "researcher" and the "researched" to be lessened. A thematic narrative analysis was used in exploring the various constructions and representations made by sex workers in talking about their stories of entry and experience, and the meanings they ascribed to their work and presence in the industry.

Three broad themes, representative of the main research interests, were developed over the course of the research. They categorised the content of narrative accounts into themes of entry (represented by Context), experiences (represented by Experiences), and interpretations (represented by Meaning). A number of sub themes were then developed to define and signify the individual experiences and thoughts contained within context, experiences, and meaning. The theme of context contained sub themes of a desire for money/independence; childhood neglect/abuse; and a stressful trigger and introduction to the industry. The theme of experiences contained sub themes of a first sex work experience; danger and discrimination; life on the street; and clients. Finally, the theme of meaning contained sub themes of perceptions of sex work; dissociation; forgiveness; community; education; and God and spirituality.

The study reviewed the main findings from a number of topics commonly explored by research on sex work and related them to the narrated opinions and constructions of the participants cited in this study. The desire for money/independence was identified by participants as the main reason for entry into sex work, an observation that stood in accordance with previous research. A similar level of categorisation was observed in this study, where a number of individuals attributed entry to a desperate desire for money to

survive and others desired money and the addition of independence. The majority of participants described themselves entering sex work because they had no choice, and mentioned childhood neglect/abuse as a reason for educational/technical inexperience and the loss of a male provider as integral to their entering sex work. Other participants expressed their recognition of an active choice in entering the industry and constructed sex work as the means to escape some form of dependence on another (whether financial, drug-related, or social).

Stories of childhood neglect/abuse were reported by a number of participants. They were differentiated into experiences of neglect and those of abuse (whether physical or sexual) and were constructed as an important reason for entry into sex work because they affected the individual's ability to gain educational/technical skills. While an association between sexual brokenness and entry into sex work was made (supported by research), this was not entirely maintained, as a concerted effort was made by one participant to counter this argument by generating an alternative narrative that saw entry into sex work as unrelated to a history of abuse. The construction of an alternative narrative highlighted the ability and freedom of individuals to determine which experiences they constructed as significant or insignificant to their entry and the possible reasons for why they may have presented this view to their audience. It was suggested that in drawing a relationship between childhood neglect/abuse and entry into sex work, individuals communicated a lack of agency in their entry and placed responsibility on their circumstances in deciding to enter sex work. In contrast, it was suggested that individuals who did not acknowledge a relationship between abuse and possible entry into sex work, communicated a strong sense of choice in entering the industry and may have presented this view because they wanted to project a positive image of sex work and further the interests of decriminalising sex work.

A stressful trigger and introduction into the industry was identified as being influential in the decision made to enter sex work. All participants recalled being introduced to sex work by another person, often a friend who was already working within the industry. While this was not a topic explored exclusively by research, it was found that participants in this study spoke about an element of surprise or shock in their entry, similar to the findings of research that reported sex workers feeling tricked into entering sex work. Entry into sex work was reported when a stressful trigger (that produced states of desperation in participants) was coupled with a "way in" to the industry.

The first sex work experience was spoken of with ambivalence. A number of participants communicated a mental conflict in their decision to continue working in sex work after a negative first experience was reported. The narrative of ‘victimhood’ or ‘active agent’ (entry and continuation in sex work owing to constraint or choice respectively) was not observed in its entirety. While the first experience was typically described as unpleasant and bad, it provided relief in the financial support it supplied. A continuation in sex work was then constructed as being necessary to the participant’s survival, yet something in which they were not willing to partake. While participants may have demonstrated a certain “victimhood” in their circumstances and feelings of entrapment, they demonstrated agency in entering sex work as a means to reduce this sense of victimhood. This did not however mean that entry and continuation in sex work was perceived from a perspective entirely of choice.

The subtheme of danger and discrimination, in relation to literature on stigmatization and violence, confirmed the reported presence of prejudice and violence in the lives and experiences of sex workers. Prejudice and discrimination exercised by clients, police and broader society, were highlighted as being foundational to the propagation of violence and feelings of difficulty in sex work. Frustration in sex work was largely attributed to the inability to report experiences of violence due to the illegal nature of sex work and having one’s experiences negated by the police, an observation confirmed by previous research. The experience of trauma, while not labelled as such by participants, was explored in detail. Narratives of trauma, contained within the context of danger and discrimination, were related in different ways by participants. Theory on trauma was used to interpret its narration. While some participants were able to articulate their experiences of trauma, others expressed their experiences through the physical demonstration of scars and the silence of tears. It was argued that through the physical demonstrations of wounds and tears, the nature of trauma was revealed as an enduring and interfering presence within the lives of those it affected.

The subtheme, life on the street, incorporated sex workers’ stories of illness, poverty and homelessness. Illness was a reported reality in the lives of participants. It was found that individuals portrayed themselves as critical of unsafe sexual conduct (while reporting and explaining times of sexual compromise) and knowledgeable about the safety precautions necessary for preventing and dealing with infection. The sex workers cited in this study did not necessarily communicate a difficulty in seeking services to maintain sexual and reproductive health (as is argued by previous research), but did mention that they would be

more likely to seek treatment at clinics if the clinic personnel treated them with respect and confidentiality. Life on the street was also characterised by reports of poverty and homelessness that were particularly related to the nature of street-based sex work. This was in accordance with the literature reviewed. In response to experiences of poverty and homelessness, participants expressed a desire to earn a more consistent salary in alternative work (even if it was less than their conditional earnings in sex work) or through a regulated form of legalised sex work.

Finally, clients, as the last sub theme in the theme of experiences, were described with ambivalence. They were perceived as comforting when they accepted and provided for the individual and treated her well, and distressing when they rejected her, treated her with disrespect or abused her, and threatened her social and/or financial independence. Exclusive relationships formed with clients were at times constructed as a means of leaving the industry in search of a better life. The “saving” perception of the client was related to and confirmed by previous research.

Within the theme of meaning, perceptions of sex work, as difficult, enjoyable, or a “way of living”, were related to the literature on topics of choice and constraint, expressions of female agency and empowerment. While the majority of participants communicated a dislike of sex work (related to negative experiences, inconsistent income, anxiety and depression and feelings of powerlessness), they communicated that enjoyment in sex work was related to being treated well by clients, feeling accepted, and playing an active role in bettering one’s circumstances. Entry into sex work was not constructed as a preferred choice, but as a way of living by some participants. Similar survival mechanisms were reported by participants in this study to the literature on violence and strategies for coping, including an employment of instinct and intuition. The various perceptions of sex work helped individuals to make sense of their experiences and presence in the industry in allotting a sense of powerlessness to their presence (through negative perceptions of sex work), agency (through positive perceptions), and necessity (through more neutral perceptions, both in part positively or negatively inspired). Sex work was only perceived to be an expression of female agency and empowerment (in relation to Lucas’ (2005) assertions) by one participant, who maintained that she was empowered through withholding sex from men unless its appropriate price was paid. Sex work as an expression of female agency and empowerment was shown in a more

subtle way when individuals perceived sex work as a means of bettering their life circumstances and so taking an active role to reduce feelings of powerlessness.

Dissociation, although not referred to as such, was used by participants in coping with bad experiences in sex work and fulfilling a number of different roles. While drug use was a theme rarely addressed by participants in their narratives of sex work, it was at times reported when individuals required help in coping with negative experiences or fulfilling their necessary roles. An association between drug use and entry into sex work was only reported on two occasions. A distancing of the self from other sex workers in terms of sex work conduct and levels of respectability was reported and similarly supported by research findings.

Sub themes of forgiveness, community, education, and God and spirituality, were smaller in scope and reported to be beneficial in helping individuals cope with their work. Integral to each of these themes was a sense of the sharing of personal stories, experiences and knowledge, that allowed individuals to provide testimony and validation of their experiences, and find purpose through helping others. The focus on the interpersonal, then, was described as deeply comforting for most participants. This is not to suggest that aspects of community and God and spirituality were not regarded with scepticism and anxiety at times, or that areas of forgiveness and education were easy or counted as valuable by all participants, merely that in comparison to internal processes of coping (through perceptions of sex work and processes of dissociation), they were regarded as deeply comforting.

In light of these findings, it would appear that it is largely simplistic to view entry and continuation in sex work from perspectives communicated by either choice/constraint paradigms alone. Most individuals framed their presence in the industry from a place of powerlessness and constraint, however, demonstrated attempts to regain power and exercise agency in the micro decisions they made. To conclude that individuals enter sex work solely by choice is unrealistic and unrepresentative of the views reported in this study, and to argue that individuals enter sex work solely by constraint denies them the responsibility and agency in making decisions to better their circumstances. Choice-within-constraint was found to be the best alternative for conceptualising the decisions street-based sex workers made to enter and stay in sex work and to represent the way in which they framed their presence in the industry. This makes a new contribution to the literature exploring the antecedents of entry

into sex work. It not only suggests at a new way of conceptualising entry into sex work in challenging notions of a choice or constraint-inspired entry, but through the narrative gaze, suggests that these stories are constructed from a number of scripts and told in a particular way to a particular audience. It also views the individual as contextually and socially shaped, portraying the realities of women as more complex than conceptualised by choice/constraint paradigms.

While the study was born in a context highly influenced by the criminalisation/decriminalisation debate in South Africa, it was not meant to draw conclusions regarding whether sex work ought to be criminalised or decriminalised in South Africa. Its purpose was to highlight the need for research exploring the duality of choice and constraint in women's lives, and allow sex workers the opportunity to voice their struggles and comforts in order to gain a better understanding of how sex workers perceive their work, and whether debates around criminalisation/decriminalisation have neglected to hear the concerns of the actors themselves. While it has been argued that criminalisation is not an appropriate response to sex work as it achieves neither the cessation nor prevention of sex work and prevents individuals from reporting experiences of violence due to its illegal nature, I question whether the decriminalisation of sex work would be a more appropriate response. While it would challenge the stigma of sex work as an illegal activity and ideally reduce the level of discrimination and violence it attracts, it would not in itself address the contextual issues the individual constructs as important for her entry into and continuation in sex work (as represented within the current study). This may be an important starting point to consider in the creation and implementation of intervention strategies exercised by outreach programmes in making contact and building relationships with individuals within this marginalised and exploited group of the population. It also questions the comprehensiveness of the arguments supporting criminalisation/decriminalisation that base their premises on the reasons for why individuals enter sex work (attributing entry to the reasons dictated by choice/constraint dichotomies).

On a practical level, having heard the stories of these women and the immense amount of violence and trauma they are exposed to, I can only but stress the need for more services aimed at caring for and providing the necessary counselling and support for sex workers who are trying to rebuild their lives after experiencing the shattering effects of trauma. The majority of sex workers voiced that they would prefer to engage in alternative forms of work,

but without the provision of employment, such preferences will not be realised. In addition to this, without adequate affirmation and counselling, individuals may feel unable to leave the sex work industry due to feelings of “being used” (Honey) and having internalised the identity of the sex worker construct. Narrative therapy, though not the focus of this study, may be valuable in helping individuals express their stories and bear witness to their experiences of trauma, and in so doing, find validation and healing in their lives. It was comforting for individuals who had been victims of violence and abuse to speak of their experiences and have their experiences of trauma validated on a cultural level by members of the broader community. A community-based ‘story-telling’ forum, employing the tools used by the Memory Box Project^{xix} for example, may therefore be suggested as useful in allowing the traumas experienced by sex workers to be documented, represented and expressed, so that they may become interpersonal and then cultural traumas in order for healing and effective intervention strategies to ensue. Intervention strategies aimed at helping sex workers ought to take a holistic approach to providing care and support, so that the individual’s economic, social, physical, spiritual, and psychological needs are addressed, and not treated in isolation of one another. The individual traumas expressed within this study need to become cultural traumas if a ‘way out’ is to be provided for individuals wishing to leave the sex work industry.

Future research that explores the stories that male sex workers tell about their entry into sex work and their experiences and meanings made in the industry, would offer an interesting comparison to the findings of this study. The stories of Anna and Leandre were included in this research (individuals who, by nature of their being transgendered, consider themselves to be female), and often stood in contrast to the experiences and meanings constructed by their ‘biologically’ female counterparts. This may have been because the power relations present between these participants and their clients was different to the power relations present in the heterosexual exchange between the biologically female sex worker and her male client. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to see the ways in which male sex workers construct and define their experiences of sex work, the meanings they make, and the stories of how they came to be involved in sex work. It may be interesting, for example, to compare the stories of entry told by male sex workers to those of female sex workers, who tended to construct entry into sex work from reasons owing to technical/educational inexperience related to dependence upon a male provider. Accessibility to this sample would not be as easy as accessibility to a female sample, yet would prove to be valuable in its research contributions.

While the effects of early childhood trauma and conditions of PTSD in sex workers have been widely studied, the trauma contained in narratives of sex work (as far as I am aware) has not been studied as a topic on its own. This might be interesting to research in terms of the healing that may ensue when individuals are given the platform to voice and validate their experiences and, perhaps through narrative restructuring, incorporate their experiences of trauma into their life narratives so that it does not persist as so unintegrated an experience. It could also be used as a means of assessing the effectiveness of narrative therapy in communities exposed to large and frequent amounts of trauma that do not have access to support as a largely marginalised and stigmatized group.

The current study contributes to the research on sex work in challenging the way entry into sex work is conceptualised, through representing the intersections of choice and constraint, power and powerlessness, and agency and passivity, as communicated and shared through the stories sex workers tell about their work. It challenges the way the sex worker is constructed by looking at the ways in which she constructs herself, and the social and cultural contexts that shape such constructions. The narrative approach to the research has allowed actors within the industry the chance to voice their views and opinions and speak about the reasons and events they have constructed as significant in their entry and presence within the industry. It proposes that stories may be a valuable resource through which expression, exploration and understanding in sex work may ensue, and allow for processes of healing.

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APPENDIX A: Core narratives

1. Anna

Anna is a 23-year-old transgender who has been in the sex work industry for about three and a half years. She was introduced to sex work by her friends and is currently^{xx} working on the street and through the internet. For the first twelve years of Anna's life she was sexually and physically abused by her stepfather and witnessed the abuse of her mother. Having known her mother for only four years of her life, her mother's death sent her from family member to family member where she experienced more abuse. She was abused by her aunt's husband, moved to another aunt who worked on a farm about two hours from Cape Town, and experienced yet more abuse. It was at this point that she met her future adoptive parents who were staying as guests on the farm and had made adoption propositions. A few months later, Anna decided to leave the farm and walked to Cape Town. She contacted her future adoptive parents and the adoption went through. She recalls that things were good for a few months. The day she walked from the farm to Cape Town was marked as a significant day for Anna. She said that after this point she became hardened and angry, a "horrible person". She had her first sex work experience in grade 11, matriculated in grade 12, and started a cooking course after school. Her second sex work experience occurred during this time when Anna began experiencing family tension with her adoptive parents. After leaving them, she re-entered sex work and began living with various people in various places.

In the first part of her story, Anna communicates that a strong desire for independence impacted her decision to enter sex work. She asserted that she enjoys her work, sees it as any other job and highlights the benefits of working as a sex worker. In the central plot of her story, she speaks about life in the industry and her experiences of abuse, rape, drugs and difficulties as a sex worker. She describes her frustration with the police and social stigmas of sex work and the events leading up to her hitting "rock bottom". She often describes turning points of power and powerlessness in which moments of powerlessness, for example in her experiences of childhood abuse and rape, are translated to those of power, in which Anna exercises authority, independence and control in sex work. Here sex work forms an ambivalent space where both power and powerlessness is experienced.

In the last part of her story, Anna emphasizes that she is "building in". She reflects on her experiences and asserts that they have made her stronger and more resilient. A theme running

throughout Anna's narrative was her assertion that neither her abusive childhood nor her experience of an unloving father impacted her decision to enter sex work.

2. Bhavani

Bhavani is a 38-year-old woman who has been in sex work for the past three years. At the time of her entry, Bhavani's unemployment and acquired drug habit amplified the stress of having to provide for her two children without additional male support. She was introduced to sex work by her partner at the time, but decided to start working independently because she wanted to have independent control of her finances. She is currently working on the streets.

From 1993 – 2003, Bhavani experienced a number of difficult events. She witnessed her boyfriend and best friend's love affair and reports to have "snapped" in which she attempted suicide and was hospitalized. She reports that a reason for her 'snapping' was also because her boyfriend had kept her hostage in her house for eight years and she "could not handle it anymore". During this time, she met the father of her children who was a gangster and who introduced her to the gangster world, and she began taking drugs with her work colleagues. As a sickly child, Bhavani was spoilt and fussed over by her mother, and when her mother died in 2003, she became the "black sheep" of the family and found it difficult to cope with the responsibilities her mother had taken care of for her. She desired independence and this resulted in her running away from home. These events came to influence her decision to enter sex work in 2005. Around 2006 (she does not specify the exact year), Bhavani met her "sugar daddy" who had been a regular client and wanted her to leave sex work and stay with him. She reports that he "locks her up" because he does not want her to be a sex worker but that she feels trapped with him. She said that it reminded her of the eight years she was held hostage in her home by her previous boyfriend, and she repeatedly runs away from him until he finds her again and brings her back. This 'run – away'/return cycle has been occurring for the last 2-3 years since she has been working. She says:

Me and my boyfriend went out from school days. And I had a best lady friend. And one day I caught them in my bed. Like I caught them red-handed in my bed, and that's the time I cut my wrist and I took tablets. I couldn't handle it. And that also makes me go in to the street. From that time.

Thematically, Bhavani's narrative indicates that her entry into sex work was based primarily upon her desire to generate a larger income so that she could support her acquired drug habit, be independent, and provide for her children. On later reflection, she attributes her entry in some part to the witnessing of her boyfriend and best friend's love affair and her consequent suicide attempt. She reports that her active decision to enter sex work took form when she arrived at work and found that the factory had closed down. Bhavani appears to tell stories primarily of danger: she recalls about four stories where she had been exposed to the danger of clients and tells similar stories regarding her experiences with the police. She describes feeling "used" and dirty when clients do not pay her and places a large degree of importance on listening to her instincts or "senses".

Her narrative is characterised by stories of illness, stress/anxiety, guilt, and cycles of avoidance/'running away'. Her story seems to be one of the classic 'prodigal daughter' stories: she seems to desire community with her family but is distanced by feelings of guilt and shame that have led her to withdraw and desire isolation. Such isolation however, is not desired in the form of being "locked away" or "trapped". When these feelings arise, Bhavani typically deals with them through the use of drugs and "running away". Her narrative also contains stories communicating ambivalent love messages: the initial betrayal of finding her boyfriend with another lover caused her to 'snap'. She seemed to experience feelings of rejection and inadequacy related to her age and race within sex work. This contributes towards her stress levels as she worries about her personal ability to make money and provide for herself and her children. She does not reflect positively on her experiences within sex work and desires to leave the industry.

3. Clarissa

Clarissa is a 49-year old woman who has been a sex worker for just under 25 years. Having thus worked during pre and post-apartheid times, Clarissa has come to experience both 'old' and 'new' forms of sex work and has been able to reflect on changes in the industry over the last 25 years. She was introduced to sex work by the other girls who stayed near her and is currently engaging in a number of different work avenues and trying to leave street-based sex work. At the time of her entry, Clarissa was experiencing financial pressure because her job was not providing sufficient funds for her living expenses. She was raising a 2-yr-old child alone and did not want to move and join her family in the townships. She wanted to have financial independence and seized the opportunity to work in the clubs as a short-term plan.

Clarissa's narrative is one of reflection and analysis. She begins by drawing comparisons between the 'old' and 'new' forms of sex work, as they occurred before and after apartheid. She went into great detail to explain the changes in dress, talk and attitude of old and new sex workers, describing old sex work as almost exclusive and secret, and new sex work as overt, crude and obvious. On a number of occasions, Clarissa leads the interview, asking and answering questions she thinks I may be interested in, such as, "going on to the next topic, 'why do men go to sex workers?'" Her narrative contains much insight, reflection and intellect, in which she draws on the 'psychology of sex workers' as something of interest. Her message here was one in which she believed that most sex workers have "that sexual part of them has been broken". She told me that she was raped at the age of 17 and that she does not know one sex worker who has not experienced some form of sexual abuse in their pre-sex worker life. In the central plot of her narrative, Clarissa asserts her power and control in sex work. She describes a certain form of exclusivity in which sex workers choose their clients, how much they will charge, and what will happen in the sexual encounter. She denies assertions of client danger and violence and notes that for the most part she has experienced well-mannered and caring clients because she has been vigilant and professional. She also speaks about a certain 'splitting' that occurs, where she fulfils her role as mother on the one hand, and a sex worker on the other.

Clarissa is currently engaging in a number of diverse opportunities in which she is trying to facilitate the self-actualization of other sex workers into individuals who live up to their full potential. This mindset has developed over a number of years where she has experienced the hardships of drug addiction and brokenness and "seem(s) to have turned a corner".

4. Portia

Portia is a 29-year old woman who has been involved in sex work for the past five years. At the time of her entry, Portia was under financial stress because her boyfriend, who had been supporting her and their two children, passed away. She was introduced to sex work when she asked her friend how she was able to make so much money and is currently working at the truck stop. When Portia's parents died in a car accident at the age of eleven years old, she was looked after by her uncle and his wife. She recalls restrictive family circumstances in which she was often neglected, treated differently to her cousins, and prevented from gaining adequate experiential and/or educational skills. She met the father of her children in 1995 and was supported by him for the next few years. During this time, Portia was prevented from

getting a job and leaving the house because of her boyfriend's jealousy. When her boyfriend died in 2002, Portia entered sex work because she was unable to support herself and children.

Portia recalls stories of violence, illness, and the difficulties she experienced in sex work over the next six years. Central to her narrative was the story of how HIV had impacted her life. She was diagnosed HIV positive in 2004 and describes the lifestyle adaptations she has had to make to her diet, lifestyle and health. Of great support has been the HIV community she has come to know and work with, in reaching out to sex workers and educating them about their rights and how to practice safe sex. She talks about how she came to be involved with a sex worker organisation and how they have facilitated outreach programmes.

Her story communicates a deep sense of pain with regard to her HIV status and the stigmas surrounding sex work. She tells me at one point that she wants people to know that if you are a sex worker you will have HIV/AIDS and must practice safe sex. This message was contrasted with another that she tried to convey: that clients, rather than sex workers, are the ones spreading HIV. She spoke of the difficulties of living a secret life and fulfilling both mother/community and sex worker roles. She communicates a sense of responsibility for her status and finds comfort in talking about her experiences with her friends, reaching out to younger girls on the road, and having the love of her two children, yet questions whether she would have become a sex worker had her parents not died and she had been able to acquire the necessary educational and experiential skills to find alternative work.

5. Ellie

Ellie is a 35-year-old woman who has been in sex work for ten years. She contextualizes her story by stating that the reason why she became a sex worker is because she was abused (she clarifies this later on to refer to neglect or negligence on the part of her grandmother). On further enquiry, Ellie explains that her grandmother neglected to pay for her school fees because of the cultural perspectives of education she had grown up with. At the time of her entry into sex work, Ellie was in need of money and decided to join her flat mate at a truck stop. She continues to work at a truck stop yet desires to work in "any other job but this".

Ellie's narrative communicates a sense of anxiety, wariness and suspicion. She repeatedly communicates the importance of practicing safe sex, personal hygiene, providing for your child's education, and the importance of not taking drugs. This space of awareness and vigilance has developed from a past of illness and pain, where Ellie explained that she

contracted HIV from her partner at the time. As a result of her past experiences within sex work, Ellie is opposed to forming relationships with clients, having a child, and trusting people. There is a fear around infecting her child and bringing a child into a world of disease. Of thematic importance is the feeling of deep shame and guilt that Ellie communicates in fearing exposure and being seen as a disgrace to her family and culture. She also communicates a racially-biased suspicion and selection of clients, and exercises agency in the sex work encounter. She has taken comfort in learning about drugs, safe sex, and diseases, and in educating other sex workers about the risks involved.

6. Fran

Fran is a 48-year-old woman who has been in sex work for the past eleven years. At the time she started sex work, she was escaping from a destructive marriage and violent husband, with five children to support. She was married to a male provider who became increasingly abusive, possessive and jealous throughout the years of their marriage. She recalled how her husband did not want her to work and how she had to stay at home and raise her children while he remained the sole supporter. After a few years of marriage her husband began to have an affair. Fran's confrontation of his affair resulted in the start of an abusive cycle that continued and escalated throughout the years of their marriage. He began to physically abuse her, particularly after he had been drinking, and injured her seriously on a number of occasions. It would appear from her narrative that she entered sex work after she and her husband had separated, when a friend she was staying with introduced her to it. She had struggled to find a job, and when her friend introduced her to sex work, Fran decided to give it a try. She felt a deep sense of guilt and avoided her friends, family and husband, yet left and re-entered sex work when, after a particularly violent attack, Fran escaped and fled to Cape Town, and re-entered sex work when a number of work ventures failed.

Fran's story is one of escape. Central to her narrative is the question of 'why'. She has not been able to make sense of her husband's violence and affairs, nor why she has come to be a sex worker and face all that she has. She recalls many horrific stories of violence and rape exercised by the hands of clients and police. She communicates a deep mental and moral struggle about her involvement in sex work, feeling ashamed and guilty about her secret life yet happy in terms of being able to provide for her children. She has found meaning and comfort in her relationship with God, sharing her experiences with her friends, spending time

with her five daughters, and reaching out to other sex workers using her affiliation to a sex worker organisation.

7. Gilly

Gilly is a 42-year-old woman who has been a sex worker for eight years. Of significance was her opening line: “Ok, firstly my name is (Gilly), I work in (location) as a sex worker. There’s some things happening to us, is too dangerous, through the police.” This highlights the central theme of her narrative, that is, her desire to inform her audience of the dangers that sex workers are exposed to and the discrimination they face. At the time of Gilly’s entry into sex work, she states that she was a single mother who had no husband or job and was “suffering”. Gilly contextualized her entry into sex work during a time when she was “suffering”. She had been depending on her sister for food and support and when her sister refused to continue providing for her and introduced her to sex work, she decided to try it. Gilly said, “I’ve got a lot of family, they can’t help me. I just help myself”. Entering sex work and generating money to provide for her children was part of Gilly’s endeavour to become financially independent and take responsibility for her finances. She says that she had looked for a job and wasn’t able to find one, was unable to continue relying on her sister for support, and seized an opportunity to work when her sister encouraged her to dress a certain way and go to work with her. Gilly is currently working on the streets.

Gilly recalls stories of danger and violence, whether experienced directly by herself or indirectly by her friends. Her experiences have caused her physical distress: she often feels anxious and distrusting in social situations and is not comfortable to have more than one friendship. Her narrative communicates a negative perspective of her work, which is only justified in terms of the money she makes and the ability she has to provide for her children. Her role as a mother has made seeing young girls on the road more difficult and she does not wish for her children to lead similar lives. She has been able to find meaning through community work and educating other sex workers about safe sex practices, safety precautions and their rights. For this reason, it may be argued that her opening line was chosen for a purpose to convey a specific message about the danger sex workers are facing from police violence and/or their apathy to the violence experienced by sex workers.

8. Honey

Honey is a 30-year-old woman who has been in and out of the sex work industry for the past ten years. Honey begins her story by recalling how her male provider left her and she became the sole supporter of her child, brother and sister. Throughout her narrative, Honey emphasizes that she has “no choice” but to work in order to provide for herself and family. Her enjoyment of the work exists in terms of being provided for and being able to support her family, while her dislike of the work is due to the danger of sex work, the inconsistency of cash flow, and the burden of living a secret life. Her friend introduced her to the work and although she did not enjoy her first sex work experience, she continued to work because she felt “already used” and began to see the money coming in. She currently works on the streets.

Honey speaks about topics of client and police violence, competition amongst sex workers, and the difficulties she has experienced working in the industry. While she frames her involvement in sex work from a perspective of powerlessness (having no choice but to work), she reveals moments of power by exercising active choice in the business encounter, deception of clients, ending drinking whilst working, and leaving and re-entering sex work. Honey has taken comfort in speaking with friends, sharing her ‘secret life’ with her sister, and journaling about her experiences.

9. Izzy

Izzy is a 28-year-old woman who has been working as a sex worker for the past nine years. She began sex work when she wanted to help her mother support herself and her sister, and afford the necessary items so that her sister would go to school. Izzy’s narrative is one of deep pain and hurt. She begins her narrative by saying that she does not think it is a story, because nobody said that she must do this. She communicates messages of both power and powerlessness, in that, while she asserts that nobody made her become a sex worker, she had no choice but to enter and remain in sex work in order to provide for her sister. She indicates a negative perception of sex work and her experiences within the industry, asserting that there is not one part of sex work she enjoys. She is currently working at a truck stop.

Central to her narrative is an emptiness of trauma, in which silences and tears fill the absence of words. She also communicates a deep pain around her desire to have an active role in her son’s life, who is currently staying with his father, a past client of hers. Izzy is struggling to

find meaning in her experiences and come to terms with her past trauma. She finds that drinking and going out to night clubs, is the only thing that helps her to feel better.

10. Kathy

Kathy is a 47-year-old woman who first began sex work around the age of 19. She begins her narrative by recalling the events of childhood abuse. Kathy was sexually abused by her father from the age of 14. She told her mother, whose disbelief and denial of the abuse influenced Kathy's decision to run away from home and flee to her aunt. Her aunt became her "protector" and provider, but when she passed away, Kathy was no longer under the shelter of her protector and became exposed to the rejection and mistreatment by her cousins. She entered sex work when she was introduced to it by her friend, and is currently working on the streets.

Kathy's entry into sex work is told within a context of necessity and constraint. Her first experience of sex work was not an enjoyable one. She and her friend had caught a lift to Cape Town with a truck driver and came to a sexual arrangement with the truck driver as they did not have the money to pay for the lift. She reports a negative experience of this event, while asserting that she did not have a "choice" and re-iterates the context in saying her aunt was no longer there to protect her.

She began to work on the streets in order to make money to support herself, and tells stories of danger and abuse exercised by the hands of clients, police and gangs that she experienced. She married a regular client of hers who told her that he wanted her to leave the streets because he loved her. She saw this as an opportunity for a new life and decided to leave the streets and become his wife. When her husband became abusive she ran away again and re-entered sex work when she was unable to find alternative work.

Kathy's narrative seems to be one of pain, where she recalls consistent themes of abuse, rescue, and running away. Of interest was her ability to forgive her father for his abuse yet her inability to forgive her mother's denial and negation of the abuse. She communicates a deep pain regarding her mother's disbelief, and the cultural messages that governed her response. She is comforted through conversations with her friends and being involved with outreach work. At the time of the interview, Kathy reported feeling angry because she felt she was unable to exercise her real talent in life, was distrusting of others, and was frustrated

because she felt like she wants to leave sex work but requires the government to provide jobs or secure sex work as a working profession in order to do so.

11. Leandre

Leandre is a 34 year old transgender who has been working as a sex worker for the past twelve years. She began working when her friend, another transgender, introduced her to the industry and the means of affording her drug habit. Leandre reports a positive first experience of sex work. She told me the story of her entry: how she had dropped out of school in grade 10, worked two jobs and had started taking heavier drugs with friends that were involved in sex work. She also recalls her experience of heartache, how she had fallen in love when she was 16 and how this impacted her decision to become a sex worker. She recalls leaving home at the age of 21, moving in with a good friend, and becoming involved in the industry. She is currently working on the streets.

Leandre's narrative is one of ambivalence. She begins her story asserting that she "loves (her) job and (she) loves (her) life", yet mentions later on that sex work is "not a life" and the pleasures she thought drugs would provide have failed to satisfy her. It is also one of disjuncture and illness: she recalls the events of being involved in a car accident that left her with head-trauma and impaired eyesight. She speaks about her HIV status and her fears that she will pass away before her parents, before she has a chance to make them proud of her. She also frequently mentioned the reality and trouble of "police corruption" and how she has struggled to work within the context of the illegality of sex work.

Central to her narrative is a story of her sexuality and gender. She recalls falling in love at the age of 16 and how her heartache impacted her decision to enter sex work. This was also due to a large degree of family tension and the pressure she felt in having to provide a consistent cash flow for her family. She explains the difficulties she has experienced being transgendered and how her community has ostracized and teased her for her sexual identity. She recalls the story of how she came to have a relationship with God and experienced freedom and redemption in Christ when she accompanied a person to church and felt filled with God's spirit, feeling like a man for the first time in her life.

She is able to find meaning through the work she does in the community and in her participation in challenging homophobia. She is feeling deeply frustrated with where she is in

her life however, and dreams to earn an income so that she can stay in her own house and afford luxury items. She realises that her drug habit is preventing her from going further in life yet denies that it has a substantial hold on her life.

12. Marian

Marian is a 33-year old woman who has been in sex work for just under a year. At the time of her entry, Marian was under a great deal of stress having to pay for the funeral expenses of her deceased husband, after having been ostracized by his family who blamed her for her husband's death (suicide). Throughout her narrative, Marian maintains that she has "no choice" but to work as a sex worker in order to support herself.

Marian contextualizes her decision to enter sex work by telling the story of how she and her friend were sitting together smoking drugs when her friend told her that the only way she was able to support herself was through sex work, because like Marian, she too had "nothing", no support and no "man" and needed to do this in order to "survive". Before her first experience, Marian recalls a mental struggle regarding whether she must or must not do it and became more educated and experienced as a result of her first sex work encounter.

Marian's narrative describes a process of learning assertion in the sex work encounter through the use of substances (drugs and alcohol), robbing clients, and being educated about how to better assert control in the sex work encounter. This did not come about without the experience of violence and abuse: she describes an incident when she was gang-raped by a number of men who were at a client's house, another incident of being taken to a deserted beach and beaten, and being 'dropped' in a remote location with no money. Marian uses drugs and alcohol on weekends because she says that she is more able to assert herself and come across more strongly when a client poses a problem to her.

Throughout her narrative Marian maintains that sex work is "hard" and dangerous, but that she has no choice but to work. She says, "I'm not feeling alright (about being a sex worker) but I have to feel it. Because I don't have a choice." She said that sex work might be better if the government made arrangements to create safer sex work environments such as hotels where clients could go for sex.

13. Natasha

Natasha is a 27- year old woman who has been in and out of sex work for the past nine years. At the time of her entry, Natasha's boyfriend and father of her two children had been arrested and sentenced to jail for 11 years. She went to stay with her parents and managed to get a job working at a restaurant and then entered sex work when her contract ended.

Natasha said that her first sex work experience was difficult. She experienced a mental and moral struggle regarding whether she should work and expressed fears regarding disease and her parents finding out about her work. She also explained that it was difficult because at the truck stop there was a lot of fighting and drinking. She began to drink as a result of this and it helped her to feel more comfortable in the sex work encounter. Drinking helped Natasha to quiet the voice of conscience and to feel more interesting and outgoing and appealing to the clients.

While Natasha is currently working within the indoor sector of sex work, I have included her narrative because of the experiences she has had both on the street and working at the truck stop. A large part of her narrative centres on the differences between working indoors and outdoors and the reasons for why she has chosen to work indoors. She describes working in a private house far more safe and structured and conducive towards her role as a mother. She mentioned that she is able to spend more time with her children and prefers it to working outdoors. While Natasha asserted that she did not have any particularly bad experiences working outdoors, she mentioned that she did not like the drinking and fighting lifestyle associated with working outdoors and the occasional troubles she experienced with the police and rude clients. She plans to find a new private house when her term ends at her current workplace. She also describes the selection process in the indoor sector and mentions the changes in behaviour and appearance associated with it, such as the need to maintain a well-groomed appearance, sobriety and personal hygiene.

14. Odelle

Odelle is a 34-year old woman who has been in the sex work industry for the past 17 years. She was 17 years old when she began going with her friends to the clubs and said that she did not realise that she was entering into prostitution at the time, as she was just enjoying the clubbing and drinking lifestyle. She fell pregnant from a man she met at the club and began to charge the men thereafter as a means of supporting her child. She has worked as a sex worker

ever since.

Odelle describes a difficult childhood where she was neglected and abused by her stepmother. She left school at an early age and has struggled to find alternative work without a matric certificate. She asserted that her difficulties began when she had a child, as she had to start earning more money and sharing her money with another person. She often makes monetary contributions to her father and her stepmother and has been able to view the past and her need to provide for him now with clarity and necessity. In this sense she has forgiven him for the past hurt she experienced when she was mistreated by his wife, her stepmother.

She said that she prefers working indoors a “hundred percent” because it is much safer than working on the streets. She said that it is good because indoors you are not alone and the money is given to you before the services are provided. She described two episodes of violence where she witnessed the murder of her friend and armed robbery at two different private indoor venues respectively. She communicated an anxiety and need to start looking for alternative work because she realises that she will not be able to work as a sex worker for much longer because she is getting older.

APPENDIX B: Consent form

University of Cape Town
Department of Psychology

This study aims to explore the lives of street-based sex workers and the stories they tell about their entry into sex work. It aims to explore a) the contexts in which street-based sex workers came to be involved in sex work, b) their subjective experiences working within the industry, and c) the meanings they make of such experiences. As a participant in the study, you will contribute towards the growing body of literature on sex work, and in particular, to the life stories of sex workers themselves.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You will be asked an open-ended question asking you to tell me the story of how you came to be involved in sex work. Thereafter I may ask you to explain or expand on certain things that you tell me about. You will not be required to disclose any information that you are not comfortable to disclose, and have the choice to end the interview at any point should you wish to do so. Everything you say will be held confidential and any information that reveals your identity will be removed from the interview transcript. The results of the study will be written in the form of a thesis and may be published in a scientific journal. Your identity as a participant will be protected and held anonymous.

If you would like to participate, it is important to know that interviews will run for approximately one to one-and-a-half hours. I will record the interview on a Dictaphone and will then transcribe it into written form. The recordings will be held in a secure location and the information that is obtained will be used purely towards research. You will be compensated to the value of R100 for your time.

Should you feel the need to speak to a professional counsellor on completion of the interview, I will provide you with the necessary information that will help you to make contact with someone. I will also assist you in making contact with a counsellor should you so desire. Additional meetings can also be arranged if you would like to speak more about your experiences.

If you have read through the consent form and understand its contents and would like to participate, please fill in the information below:

Name (You may choose a fictitious name for yourself).....

Age.....

Signed.....

Date.....

Would you allow the researcher to take notes during the course of the interview?

Yes.....

No.....

ENDNOTES

ⁱ While the terms ‘sex work’ and ‘prostitution’ have been similarly referred to as “the exchange of sexual services for financial reward” (Gould & Fick, 2008, p. 5), they carry different connotations and ideologies. While terms such as ‘prostitution’ and ‘prostitute’ tend to carry rather negative connotations, the terms ‘sex work’ and ‘sex worker’ are more neutral, and make allowance for the intersection of the choices and constraints spoken about by individuals in their entering and working in the sex industry (to be explored in the current study). For this reason, ‘sex work’ has been the preferred term of use and has been used consistently throughout the study. The terms ‘prostitution’ or ‘prostitute’ have been cited only when used in quotation.

ⁱⁱ According to Leggett (1998, p. 23), “decriminalisation refers to the repealing of all laws governing the exchange of sex for money. Legalisation refers to the passing of laws allowing, but controlling, the sale of sex”. Thus when sex work is proposed to be legalised in South Africa, it means that sex work will be seen as a legitimate and taxable form of work, and regulated in terms of where it is allowed and how safely it is practiced (through the mandatory usage of condoms and health checks in the industry, for example).

ⁱⁱⁱ While it is acknowledged that there is a large degree of focus and concern around topics of human trafficking and the forced coercion of individuals into the sex work industry, it is a theme in and of itself, and is beyond the focus of this study. It has therefore been excluded from reasons of entry into sex work, as the study focuses on decisions of entry (whether motivated by choice or constraint), and not on entry by deceit or force as is intrinsic to processes of human trafficking.

^{iv} Leggett (2001, p. 107) notes: “Ethnicity stands as a proxy for a range of socio-economic and socio-cultural factors throughout the country and specifically among sex workers.” ‘Race’ then, as it is understood here, is referred to as a social construct.

^v Riessman (2008, p. 8) argues, therefore, that narratives are *strategic, functional* and *purposeful*. I question whether they are. Narratives that aim to invite political mobilization can certainly be strategic and purposeful. Other narratives may simply be functional in their ability to help an individual define and investigate their identity. Riessman (2008) admits that narrators are not always conscious of their narrative intentions, but argues that narratives serve a purpose in helping individuals make sense of their identities and larger social groupings.

^{vi} Murray (2003) reports that during the 1930s, Allport (Allport, Bruner, & Jandorf, 1941, cited in Murray, 2003) began exploring the personal stories and life histories of refugees detained in Germany during the First World War. This marked a turn from the interest in conventional and institutionalized forms of knowledge to that which was experientially and personally inspired. In addition to this, war stories, by their very nature, were often “disjointed and unfinished” (Murray, 2003, p. 100), and stood in contrast to the neatly articulated and structured stories that preceded them.

^{vii} ‘Race’, though referred to by some participants in parts of the analysis, has been excluded from the table as participants were not explicitly asked to indicate their race.

^{viii} I have referred to transgendered individuals as female because of how they conceptualize their gender.

^{ix} I have included these two brothel-based participants because of the street-based experience they gained before working within the brothel context.

^x I had the numbers and addresses of groups that offered counselling support such as the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG), Lifeline, Rape Crisis, and the Trauma Centre in Woodstock, respectively.

^{xi} As a white, young, and educated female individual who stood ‘outside’ of the experiences and realities of the participants.

^{xii} Participants have been referred to by their pseudonyms within this study in order to protect their identities and maintain their anonymity.

^{xiii} This necessity was, however, a contributing factor towards increased powerlessness and depression for individuals such as Izzy. She said that her experiences in sex work were unpleasant because of the way individuals assumed control over her, how they thought they could treat her as they pleased because they had paid for her services, and how they often had poor hygiene.

^{xiv} One is reminded of the “Pretty Woman” narrative which tells the story of how a sex worker was “rescued” from the street by an honourable client whose love for her inspired her decision to leave sex work and pursue a romantic relationship with him. It calls into question the degree to which popular culture influences the perceptions sex workers have of their work and the way in which they perceive their clients.

^{xv} It is acknowledged, however, that this may have had to do with the nature of street-based sex work as opposed to the nature of the work experienced by “call girls and escorts”, interviewed in Lucas’ (2005, p. 513) study. More desirable working conditions and material

benefits may have been reported by the latter group than communicated by street-based individuals, contributing to the assertion that sex work was chosen as a preferred choice.

^{xvi} Natasha explained that in brothel-based sex work, sex workers were required to present themselves to clients who would then select a sex worker based on his personal preference. While she mentioned that the sex worker could refuse to go with the client if she did not want to, it appeared that the power was largely held by the client in terms of her getting his business.

^{xvii} Portia explained that individuals within the sex worker community would “joke” openly with each other about their changed lifestyles after learning their HIV positive status. She mentioned that she had joked with her friend on the morning of the interview about having to eat oats for breakfast instead of mealie meal because she was HIV positive.

^{xviii} Leandre explained that while she was biologically male, she classified herself as transgendered because she was “feminine in lots of ways” and could not imagine herself having sexual intercourse with a woman. She explained that she had always felt like a woman and described falling in love with a male at the age of 16 as being a “wonderful experience”. She classified herself as transgendered above transsexual because she had not taken the route to medically alter her biological gender.

^{xix} The Memory Box Project is a community-based outreach initiative that draws on the experiences and stories of women living with HIV to create “memory books” and “body maps” (Background history of the Bambanani women’s group, retrieved 27 August 2010 from www.memorybox.co.za) as a means of helping individuals to tell their stories and come to terms with their diagnoses. While memory books were developed to help individuals understand and come to terms with their status during a time when antiretroviral treatment was not obtainable, it is argued that they are still effective in helping individuals express their experiences and seek support in community. They contain the life stories of individuals living with HIV, providing them with a canvas to express themselves. The making of body maps involves the tracing of the body by an individual, in which she can include information about her diagnosis and the ways in which it affects her. It helps the individual to see her diagnosis in a holistic way that acknowledges the social, biological, and practical implications of living with HIV.

^{xx} At the time of the interview