

NOT A SOB STORY: TRANSITIONING OUT OF SEX WORK

by

TUULIA LAW

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ABSTRACT

Although it has been argued that indoor workers in fact make up the majority of the sex industry, most of the literature on the transition out of sex work has looked at street-based workers. This interview-based qualitative research project aims to fill that gap. As such, this thesis examines the trajectories, challenges and strategies of women who transitioned or are in the process of transitioning from criminalized indoor sex work (escorting, erotic massage and domination) to the mainstream labour market. Using Ebaugh's role exit theory and Goffman's conceptualization of stigma, intersectional feminist analysis and labour theory, I position the transition as a re-negotiation of self, involving conflicts in identity and class location. My findings suggest that the transition out of sex work is characterized by multiple, parallel work trajectories, wherein the women were successfully able to transfer skills they had acquired in sex work to the mainstream labour market.

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INTRODUCTION

A few years ago, I was seduced by the idea of sex work. When I started reading about it, I discovered the tensions between sex work and feminism, but there were so many different opinions that I could not be sure who or what to believe. Finally, one day when I found myself between jobs, I saw an ad in the newspaper looking for strippers in Toronto. I decided that the best way to form my own opinion about the sex industry was by working in it, so I tried stripping. What I thought would be a lark that lasted a couple of weeks ended up being a job that I took pride in and enjoyed for years.

At first, my friends were concerned (I would not tell my family until I got accepted to graduate school), but soon they came to think of stripping the same way I did, as a job. As a stripper, I learned things about the sex industry that I could not have learned from reading about it. I learned how to put on makeup just as well as any drag queen; I learned to perform and to hustle; I learned that I could be at once a subject and an object. I also learned what it feels like to wrestle with the stereotypes and the stigma of sex work, which was a relatively new experience for me as a white, thin, feminine, middle class, educated, Canadian woman.

As a full time stripper, when I met someone for the first time and the question “What do you do?” inevitably came up, I could see that *Oh* in their eyes, as they tried to reconcile their idea of a stripper with the person standing in front of them. When I have told people about my job they have seemed surprised, judgmental, disappointed, betrayed, or sometimes perversely fascinated. Even at work, in the champagne room, customers have had the gall to ask “Why are you here?” or worse, “What are you going to do with your life? I hope you have a backup plan.”

In a way, and especially with a five-year gap in my CV, this is my backup plan. It is also work that I think is important. As such, I have undertaken this project in the hope that it can be

beneficial to, and encourage greater social inclusion of, the sex worker community. Although I have worked in the sex industry, I do not claim to speak for all (or any) other sex workers, and to this end, my research is interview-based. Predictably, my area of interest is sex work and social stigma.

Because of the stigma, sex workers are seldom credited for their labour, skill or agency. Indeed, these three things are categorically disregarded in Bonnie Sherr Klein's documentary film *Not a Love Story*, which as its name foreshadows, portrays pornography as a mechanism of violence and victimization. The film is narrated by Klein, accompanied by stripper Linda Lee Tracey who, heretofore content with her job, "after the film's intensely emotional interviews and its descent into the hardcore life...sees the error of her ways, converts, and quits the business" (Barrowclough 1982, 31).

My own experiences of the sex industry could not be further from the cruel and miserable world of Klein's portrayal. Both in my relationships with my colleagues and in my interviews for this project, I have come to understand sex workers as possessing considerable agency, skill and strategy in their work, in managing stigma, and in their lives outside the sex industry. For the workers I have known, and in response to the all too popular victimology discourse of which Klein's film is only one example, I called this project *Not a Sob Story*, because it isn't.

Instead, I argue that the transition out of sex work ought to be looked at as a labour trajectory. The sex industry does not exist in a vacuum, and in this regard there are likely many former sex workers who have successfully moved on to other kinds of jobs, yet this particular journey has received little scholarly attention. Much of the existing literature on transitioning out of sex work has focused on street-based sex workers, who make up a marginalized minority

in the sex industry.¹ In this regard, my focus on criminalized indoor workers, including escorts, dominatrices and massage parlour workers, presents an important alternative perspective.

My principal research question is: How do women transition out of sex work? My secondary research questions are: Does stigma play a role in the transition? Does gender play a role in the transition? Do intersecting marginalities such as race, class, ethnicity and (dis)ability play a role in the transition?

Although other studies have looked at this transition, many employ the term ‘exiting’ to describe it. To me, this terminology is indicative of a perspective that views sex work as violence. This becomes particularly obvious when comparing sex work to other kinds of jobs – people who have left plumbing, or teaching primary school, for example, to work in another job are not seen as having ‘exited.’ ‘Exiting’ can then be seen to be always identifying sex work as something that needs to be escaped and never returned to, and as always negating the labour of sex work. Studies about ‘exiting’ usually focus on street-based, ‘survival’² sex workers, who are sometimes recruited from ‘exit’ programs which, like rape crisis centres, are services used only by sex workers who have had bad experiences. To distance myself from these connotations, I use the term ‘transitioning’ in my work.

As my first chapter will make clear, the ‘exiting’ perspective dominates the existing scholarship on transitioning. This literature review will draw from many disciplines, including feminist studies, sociology, criminology, and psychology. These studies have been carried out from a variety of perspectives about sex work, ranging from victimization to a career.

¹ Street-based sex work has been estimated to make up 5% to 20% of all sex work (prostitution) in Canada (Canada 2006).

² ‘Survival’ sex worker is a term used to describe street-based sex workers, especially those who are addicted, who got into sex work to support a drug or alcohol habit and who are generally marginalized, and often homeless. It implies that the choice to get into sex work was very limited and usually that the individual is trapped in a marginalizing cycle. Since its connotations are so specific, it would be inadequate to replace ‘survival’ sex worker with ‘marginalized’ sex worker, so I will continue to use it in quotations despite my political reticence.

Next, my theoretical framework will discuss the particularities of the transition out of sex work by combining Ebaugh's role exit theory with Goffman's insights on stigma, incorporating intersectional feminism and labour theory. Throughout the second chapter, I will develop tools to examine the relationship between stigma and agency in the transition from sex work to mainstream jobs, in the context of the contemporary labour market.

As I will detail in my methodology, I interviewed ten women who have left or have started the process of leaving sex work in the past five years. After the interviews were completed, I conducted a qualitative analysis using themes and concepts arising from the literature and from the interview data itself. Before I present my findings however, I will introduce the participants with brief biographies in chapter four.

Although I had anticipated some of the trends that arose in the interviews, I was surprised by others. With respect to the latter, I found participants to be extremely resourceful and careful in their decisions regarding employment, and brave in their confrontations with stigma. I will discuss these and many other findings in chapter five, which will include participants' trajectories, challenges and changes, as well as how these relate to the literature.

Using the tools developed in my theoretical framework, I will present my analysis of the transition in terms of its impact on participants' social and personal identities, in chapter six. As I will detail in that chapter, transitioning out of sex work involved stigma management and a re-negotiation of fractured identities.

Finally, in my conclusion, I will summarize the characteristics and meanings of the transition, as well as how this project contributes substantively to the literature. I will also discuss possible avenues of further research. Implications for the sex worker community will be considered as I present my closing reflections on the project.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

Although the transition itself is a relatively unexplored subject, there exists a variety of scholarship about sex work that encompasses a multitude of perspectives. Indeed, sex work has been the cause of disagreements within and across disciplines. Perhaps the most sensational divide that sex work has cleaved has been amongst feminists, who have long been debating whether sex workers are victims or agents. This divide has been amply covered and reviewed by other authors (see for example Alexander 1998; Ferguson 1984; Cornell 2000; Kinnell 2002). Nonetheless, in order to situate the literature on transitioning, I begin with a short overview of this debate.

The agents-versus-victims debate began in the 1980s in the form of vicious disagreements between radical feminists, who argued that pornography and prostitution are harmful to women both individually and collectively, and libertarian, or pro-sex feminists, who supported consensual sex regardless of the kind of sex that was being consented to (Ferguson 1984). Although these debates continue to rage on even now amongst feminists and feminisms, albeit with somewhat more nuance since the advent of post-modernism, the two ends of the spectrum remain abolitionist and pro-sex work feminists (see for example Farley 2005; and Namaste 2005, respectively). While the debate appears to be polarized, sex is as visceral a topic as ever, and as such, many women's and feminists' opinions are not consistent with either side of this continuing argument.

Pro-sex work feminists, and importantly, many women involved in the sex industry themselves, use the term '*sex work*,' wherein workers sell their time and labour, not their bodies (see for example Bruckert 2002; Hartley 1997; Kinnell 2002; Leigh 1997; Namaste 2005; Queen 1997). In contrast to this, abolitionist feminists maintain that sex work is always essentially violent (see for example Farley 2004 and 2005; Jeffeys 2008; Lakeman, Lee and Jay 2004;

MacKinnon 1987; Whisnant and Stark 2004). This assumption of universal victimization is not only patronizing but also denies sex workers' agency and fails to address the scope of their experiences. As Kipnis says (1996, xi), "Who's to say whether performing sexual labor is a worse or more dehumanizing job than manual labor or service-industry labor or working on an assembly line or waitressing, other than the person doing it?"

Given the continuing vigour of these debates, it is no surprise that there exists a range of perspectives in the scholarship on transitioning, which I present in this chapter in a spectrum from trauma to labour. Despite varying ontological positions, several themes cut across the literature. These are citizenship, exclusion, stigma and practicalities of transitioning such as economic factors and transferability of skills. After an examination of the various studies and how they can be put in conversation with each other, I will discuss the common themes and the gaps in the literature.

Trauma

Although, as I have already mentioned, street-based workers make up a visible albeit small portion of the sex industry,³ many studies focus on this demographic. The following studies focus on street-based sex workers' experiences both working in, and transitioning out, of the sex industry. They largely focus on the violence, health and social difficulties relating to (thereby arguing that these have a causal relationship with) sex work, and generally use the term 'prostitution' rather than 'sex work.' Because of this, I classify these studies as having been carried out from a trauma or exploitation perspective.

³ According to Murphy and Venkatesh (2006), 15% of sex workers are street-based. A report by the government of Canada estimated that street-based workers make up 5% to 20% of sex workers (Canada 2006).

DeRiviere's (2006) study, which recruited women from a Manitoba youth 'exit'⁴ program that defines prostitution as sexual exploitation, estimated the long term effects of sex work. Study participants had been largely 'survival'⁵ sex workers, who began in their teenage years. In interviews, participants were asked about their experiences during and after sex work, including instances of violence and money spent on addictions and pimps.⁶ DeRiviere identified drug use as a factor preventing or delaying transition out of the sex industry, and suggested that former sex workers are likely to remain poor for rest of their lives. Through an economic cost-benefit analysis, DeRiviere (2006) concluded that involvement in prostitution, drugs and violence diminished the lifelong human capital potential of former youth 'survival' sex workers and impeded future participation in the labour market. Finally, DeRiviere suggested an increase in prevention and intervention programs directed at high-risk youth to decrease sex industry participation, which in her esteem, seems tantamount to being victimized in the short term and scarred in the long term.

Espousing a view similar to DeRiviere's, McIntyre conducted a retrospective research study in Calgary of 38 former street-based, youth 'survival' sex workers, in which male and female participants were interviewed about "their thoughts on the entrance, time in, attempts and successful departures out of the [sex] trade" (McIntyre 2002, 1). McIntyre referred to the sex industry as the "sexual exploitation trade" and also emphasized that all respondents "saw prostitution as something no one should do... [and] saw their street experience of prostitution as

⁴ I use 'exit' in quotes because I disagree with the negative and rescue-like connotations of the term, but it is the most accurate way to describe programs, such as that in DeRiviere's study, that operate from a trauma perspective.

⁵ As I said in my introduction, 'survival' sex worker is a term that generally connotes street-based sex workers, who are addicted, often homeless, and trapped in a marginalizing cycle. Since its connotations are so specific, it would be inadequate to replace 'survival' sex worker with 'marginalized' sex worker, so I use this term in quotations despite my political reticence.

⁶ Weldon finds that deviance or psychological type questions dominate research on sex work. On this basis, she suggests that researchers "are not immune to the common perception of sex workers as desperate, abused, amoral, predatory, lazy women" (Weldon 2006, 13).

a form of repeated abuse” (McIntyre 2002, 3). All participants attempted to leave sex work more than once (some males attempted to leave as many as fifteen times), making transitioning a lengthy process McIntyre referred to as a “cumulative learning experience” (2002, 1). Reasons to leave included violence, or the “collective effect of abuse, drugs and danger” (McIntyre 2002, 22) and also “the pursuit of goals, having a baby, trusting someone, gaining employment or seeking a stable lifestyle” (McIntyre 2002, 23). Participants said they had found it imperative yet difficult to leave behind old social networks and establish new ones when they quit. Other challenges in the transition included developing skills to deal with financial planning, social, work and intimate relationships, and addictions (McIntyre 2002). However, the most difficult thing to leave behind and the foremost reason for returning to sex work was the money. This was especially true for women, for whom:

... financial need to support children was critical. Minimum wage employment combined with day care costs meant being below the average of the working poor. While social assistance provided some financial support, it limited the opportunity to earn additional money. If more money was earned, it had to be claimed and the assistance allowance was decreased. Returning to the street offered an instant solution. (McIntyre 2002, 28-9)

Additionally, McIntyre identified a need for long-term support, including trauma counselling, both during and after the transition.

Another study, by Mansson and Hedin (1999), focused almost exclusively on street-based sex workers in Sweden. Working from an understanding of prostitution as a difficult and exploitative life situation, Mansson and Hedin attributed success in transitioning to emotional commitment. They elaborated the stages of the transitioning process as: breaking away from sex work, working through experiences and trauma, shame, liminal or marginal situation, and finally, dealing with personal and intimate relationships (Mansson and Hedin 1999). Among their participants, Mansson and Hedin differentiated between short-term or occasional sex workers,

whom they termed “guest performers,” who were able to leave sex work relatively quickly, and long term workers, whom they referred to as the “totally ensnared” (1999, 71). Reasons for wanting to leave sex work ranged from a life event, such as having a child, or a violent experience, which caused a sudden stop in sex work, to more gradual transitions. Once they had decided to leave sex work, a third of the women enrolled in school or partook in other forms of work, a third of them underwent treatment for drugs or participated in an ‘exit’ program, and a third found themselves lacking support and unemployed, and occasionally going back to sex work. Women’s transitions were influenced by structural factors such as access to jobs, education or welfare, in tandem with social stigma (Mansson and Hedin 1999).

Despite the variety of experiences in transitioning found by Mansson and Hedin, there is a strong emphasis on violence in this study. One particularly salient example of this appears in Mansson and Hedin’s assertion that prostitution is a “cycle of victimization” when they stated with certitude that three quarters of the women had had an unhappy childhood, while reticently ceding that some “*claim* to have had a happy childhood” (Mansson and Hedin 1999, 71; emphasis mine).⁷

A later study by Hedin and Mansson, published in 2003, was based on interviews with female former sex workers, half of whom had been street-based, the other half of whom had worked indoors. This time, their focus was particularly on women’s use of supportive relationships during their transition out of sex work. Hedin and Mansson found that women benefitted from supportive relationships when they were working through trauma, repairing existing relationships, and building new social networks. Some women were supported by their

⁷ This kind of over-riding or re-interpretation of sex workers’ voices is sometimes detectable through inflections in language used by scholars (see for example Sullivan 2007), the most blatant example of which is the generalization that all sex workers are victims (see for example Malarek 2003). It can also have a cumulative effect: Scoular and O’Neill (2007) suggest that Mansson and Hedin’s study was selectively used to support the UK’s new regulation of sex work, which focuses on rescue and rehabilitation.

families but found it stifling (it was suggested that a more heterogeneous network was healthier), and 25% of the women left prostitution with no support from their families because “their family relationships were too weak and conflict-ridden”⁸ (Hedin and Mansson 2003, 228). Other women were supported by new men in their lives, relatives or social workers. Despite feelings of anxiety, women were able to adapt to new social contexts, environments, groups and identities with their change of work. Hedin and Mansson suggested that sex work leads to long term difficulties with sexuality and intimacy, “contempt for men” (2003, 233), and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) – sixty percent of their participants received psychotherapy during their transition. The authors concluded that women leaving sex work need supportive relationships with friends, family and new social networks, as well as with therapists. Curiously lacking in their insistence on the urgency of supportive relationships and new social networks is the use of such resources to get jobs outside of sex work.⁹

Like Hedin and Mansson, Ward and Roe-Sepowitz also viewed sex work as trauma and their study focused on marginalized sex workers in the Southern United States. In the study, a group of incarcerated sex workers and another group in a residential ‘exit’ program participated in the Esuba program, a 12-week psycho-educational program designed to work through trauma. Both groups reported experiencing violence and childhood abuse. Upon completion of the program, self-esteem had increased and trauma symptom levels had decreased significantly for both groups. Because of this, the authors found their study to support the usefulness of trauma intervention programs for sex workers. Ward and Roe-Sepowitz further insisted that sex work

⁸ Hedin and Mansson did not speculate on the particular source of conflict. In other sections of the paper, they mentioned that women may have had poor relationships with family before their time in the sex industry due to abuse or neglect, or may have become estranged from their families due to anticipated stigma (Hedin and Mansson 2003).

⁹ The only mention of women’s use of a supportive relationship to get a job was from “men they met in connection with the breakaway” (Hedin and Mansson 2003, 228). The emphasis on being helped by men added to the victimization script by seemingly positioning participants’ “new” men as their rescuers.

causes mental health problems and “without resolution, mental health problems will prevent prostituted women from gaining “legal” employment, supporting and attaching to their children, and contributing positively to their community” (2009, 308). Although there are many ‘exit’ programs in the US, Ward and Roe-Sepowitz were critical of the fact that few have been empirically evaluated and suggested that outcome research was necessary to determine the effectiveness of such programs.

In a study released the same year as that of Ward and Roe-Sepowitz, Oselin (1999) eschewed mentioning the actual results of the ‘exit’ program in her study,¹⁰ which focused on leaving a deviant identity. The study involved participants from the Prostitution Rehabilitation Program (PRP), a residential rehabilitation program for street-based and addicted sex workers in the US. Enrollment in the PRP can be voluntary or chosen as an alternative to jail time; there is no street outreach. Within the PRP, residents are at first subject to total institutional discipline, and later to a “quasi-total” structure of increased autonomy (Oselin 1999). Oselin maintained that peer monitoring and affective bonds are “integral to conversion and identity reconstruction” and cites “ex-gay ministries” as an example of how affective bonds “encourage a new role and identity” (1999, 396-7). Successful PRP talk and behaviour included biographical reconstruction and new role embracement (Oselin 1999), which included celibacy for the duration of the program, followed by monogamy afterwards. PRP ‘success’ seemingly conformed to gendered and racialized notions of ‘respectability’ in Fellows and Razack’s (1998) sense of the term, wherein participants denounced their former ‘prostitute’ identities. Indeed, half of the participants were African American, as were the most ‘difficult’ participants. This speaks to the racial implications of ‘success’ in the PRP, which appears to be measured by adherence to an upper

¹⁰ Additionally, “the PRP does not conduct formal follow-up studies” (Oselin 1999, 403).

class, heterosexual, white female norm. Oselin, however, lauded the program as helpful to participants' transitions from a deviant to a non-deviant identity.

With their intent focus on the psychological aspects of the transition, scholars who view sex work as trauma tend to overlook, or under-examine, the importance getting a job outside of the sex industry. Even as McIntyre emphasized the draw of money as making it difficult to leave the sex industry, none of her recommendations were specific to improving access to employment. This may be because trauma is a necessarily personal subject, and thus invites a micro-level analysis, whereas improving former sex workers' access to employment would entail changing larger socio-economic mechanisms, notably stigma and the contemporary labour market, a conclusion which could only be achieved via macro-level analysis.¹¹ Instead, by identifying sex workers as traumatized deviants, studies such as these reinforce stereotypes of sex workers as irresponsible, victimized, mentally ill, and unfit mothers. As the scholars in the next section argue, these stereotypes actually exacerbate the marginalization of sex workers.

Critiques of 'exit' programs

In contrast with the previously discussed trauma-based studies, which concentrate on correcting what they perceive to be a personal problem, other scholars have taken up positions opposing state-run 'exit' programs and other mechanisms regulating sex work. These studies argue for true social inclusion.¹²

McNaughton and Sanders' (2007) criticized UK welfare intervention-based 'exit' programs for street-based sex workers as not accounting for the complexities of the transition. Like

¹¹ Curiously enough, while offering a detailed analysis of how former sex workers are disadvantaged in the labour market, DeRiviere's study did not mention stigma at all. Instead, DeRiviere (2006) portrayed sex workers as drug addicted and victims who will eventually become liabilities to the public purse, by suggesting that government policy should prevent and intervene in prostitution in order to save money that might otherwise be wasted on future social programs and decreased labour market participation.

¹² 'Social inclusion' is a term that has arguably been co-opted into neo-liberalist rhetoric. True social inclusion, then, is to neo-liberal social inclusion as acceptance is to tolerance.

Mansson and Hedin (1999), McNaughton and Sanders found that triggers to leave the sex industry included violence, criminalization, drug-related health problems, and children.

Sometimes street-based workers had difficulty in accessing services and in moving into new social networks, and because of this, transitions were gradual or took several tries. The authors stipulated that stigmatization and criminalization, particularly through “the entanglement of the welfare and criminal justice systems”¹³ (McNaughton and Sanders 2007, 897) exacerbated the difficulties of the transition and perpetuated social exclusion and the feminization of poverty.

Sanders carried out another study, this time comparing the transitions of indoor workers (escorts, sauna and massage parlor workers) to those of outdoor (street-based) workers. She identified indoor sex workers as being less criminalized and marginalized than outdoor workers. In her study, Sanders presented a typology of transitions: reactionary, gradual planning, natural progression, and “yo-yoing”, meaning going back and forth between sex work and other kinds of jobs, usually because of the discrepancy in earnings between sex work and other jobs. Both indoor and outdoor sex workers left sex work because of increased competitiveness and greater difficulty in earning money, increased danger (more commonly a factor for street-based workers) and lack of labour regulation (Sanders 2007). Participants usually kept their sex work history secret because of stigma, which resulted in “difficulties constructing a curriculum vitae because of gaps in a legitimate work history” (Sanders 2007, 91-2). Former indoor workers were employed in various occupations, whereas former street-based workers were in relatively unskilled jobs or in school. Similarly to her study with McNaughton, Sanders (2007) concluded that the criminalization of sex work may perpetuate yo-yoing and stigma, barring women from

¹³ An article published in the same year by Scoular and O’Neill was also critical of the UK’s move from punishment to so-called regulatory responses to prostitution, including “rehabilitation” programs for street-based workers and criminalization of clients, the general aim of which are to eliminate street-based sex work. Scoular and O’Neill (2007) argued that programs should not be conditional on responsabilization, but rather on inclusive notions of citizenship and social justice.

enjoying full citizenship. However, while rejecting the current regulation in the UK as portraying sex workers as deviants, Sanders argued that legalized regimes remove the deviant status from sex workers and imbue them legitimate status as workers, which many sex workers have argued is not true¹⁴ (see for example Alexander 1998; Garro 2008; *The Declaration on the Rights of Sex Workers* 2005). Sanders rejected individual emotional commitment (as in Mansson and Hedin 1999), level of self-control or responsibility, as being key to the transition, arguing instead that “structural, political, cultural and legal factors as well as cognitive transformations are key determinants” (Sanders 2007, 74) in whether or not women leave the sex industry.

These studies indicate that state-run ‘exit’ programs are not generally fashioned with sex workers’ interests and needs in mind, and instead can perpetuate stigma and social exclusion. As these scholars, along with Ward and Roe-Sepowitz, have implied, the effectiveness of such programs is questionable.

Peer-run programs

In contrast to state-designed programs or policies, as discussed above, peer-run programs (not to be confused with peer mentorship models such as that in Oselin’s study) acknowledge and respond to the factors that Sanders (2007) identified as instrumental in the transition. It should be noted that peer-run programs can (and some do) view sex work as violence and/or exploitation, which serves as a testament to the wide array of experiences and opinions about the sex industry held by sex workers themselves.¹⁵

¹⁴ Sex worker organizations tend to prefer decriminalization to legalization, and argue that decriminalizing sex work would regard sex workers as ordinary workers and permit them to regulate themselves in a similar manner to other independent trades-people (see *Stella* 2011).

¹⁵ Other organizations run by and for sex workers which do not focus on transitioning out of the industry tend to view sex work as labour. For example, the Sex Professionals of Canada views sex work as a necessary and legitimate business which should be decriminalized, and objects to ‘exit’ programs (*SPOC* 2011).

Hotaling et al. (2004) commended the effectiveness of peer-run, community-based transition programs, their open, holistic approach and their high success rates, as compared to more traditional, authoritative, ‘exit’ programs. A program such as this, called PEERS (Prostitutes’ Empowerment, Education and Resource Society) exists in British Columbia. It is staffed, run and was developed by former sex workers (Rabinovitch, 2004), and was the object of Woodman’s study. Woodman (2000) referred to the transition process as “the recovery process.” The aim of her project was to identify abilities, knowledge and skills for providing effective mentorship for those transitioning out of the sex industry, working towards improving the existing mentorship program at PEERS Vancouver.¹⁶ Woodman interviewed current and former staff members at PEERS, all of whom were former sex workers and most of whom were former PEERS clients. Woodman (2000) suggested that it may be difficult for sex workers to deal with conflict in mainstream work environments because they are accustomed to working independently, and lean towards aggression rather than diplomacy in dealing with conflicts. Rabinovitch (2004) also noted the difficulty that PEERS clients who became staff had in dealing with basic office-type employment skills like filing and time management, as many had no mainstream job experience. Woodman suggested that mentorship is important because it makes transitioning out of sex work relatively easier and less isolated. Trust, time and patience were identified as paramount to successful mentorship (Woodman 2000).

Although it is progressive in its operation and accessibility, given the use of the terms ‘survivors’ and ‘recovery process’ and the program’s government funding,¹⁷ PEERS shares some commonalities with other kinds of ‘exit’ programs. However, unlike the punitive programs

¹⁶ At the time of writing, Woodman was the Executive Director of PEERS Vancouver, and a former staff member of PEERS Victoria (Woodman 2000).

¹⁷ For more expansive descriptions of peer-run programs, see Rabinovitch 2004 and Hotaling et al. 2004.

described by Oselin and critiqued by Scoular and O'Neill, peer-run programs do seem to work towards social inclusion of sex workers more holistically and effectively.

As we have seen in this and the previous section, criminalized indoor sex workers are not generally viewed as a target for these programs. In this respect, there is a gap in focus and services¹⁸ for demographics other than youth, street-based or 'survival' sex workers.

Labour

The following studies portray sex workers as labourers and community actors whose participation in citizenship is limited by stigma. They consider how to answer to sex workers' needs for social inclusion over a longer term than those in the previous section, with an understanding of citizenship as encompassing community and labour market participation.¹⁹

Based on focus groups, Brown et al.'s (2006) study of current and former street-based sex workers in Winnipeg emphasized the interlocking nature of issues of poverty, housing, violence, health, addiction, and law enforcement with gender and race, as affecting low-income sex workers. Study participants talked about stigma making them feel excluded from their communities, and were eager to be engaged in community-building activities and jobs, but critical of the fact that helping jobs (like soup kitchens or social work) paid significantly less than private sector jobs (Brown et al. 2006). By identifying the former as less accessible and the latter as less fulfilling but necessary to earn enough money, former sex workers were depicted as rational agents instead of 'damaged goods' (as in DeRiviere 2006), victims (as in Mansson and Hedin 1999) or survivors (as in Hotaling et al. 2004 and Rabinovitch 2004). The authors

¹⁸ Tremblay (1999) designed a pilot program for transitioning sex workers that was not rescue-based, but rather encouraged participants to reflect on the meaning of the transition for their identities, and also developed mainstream integration strategies such as job interview skills. However, the program did not receive enough support to be formally implemented.

¹⁹ These two aspects of citizenship are part of a larger picture; Concannon expands on Marshall's notion of citizenship as encompassing social, civil and political elements, enabling a sense of "value, dignity and self-worth" (Concannon 2008, 330).

emphasized the “need for responsive and inclusive support networks that are close to home” (Brown et al. 2006, 51), including services such as daycare, employment training and experience, and trauma and substance abuse recovery.

Rickard’s (2001) study was based on interviews with sex workers in the UK about their reflections on their futures, hopes, jobs and retirement. Four women and one man, in their 30s, from different cultural backgrounds but all from the working class, participated in the study. They were current, part-time and occasional sex workers who had chosen to work in various sectors of the sex industry, including managerial positions. Their reasons for leaving included being fatigued by the clients or the job itself and getting too old, and some mentioned wanting to live like ‘normal’ people, however they said the money and flexibility of sex work made it difficult to leave. Rickard compiled the skills her participants mentioned into an extensive list:

... interpersonal and communication skills; small business management; high self-motivation; ability to adapt to frequent change; advertising skills; research skills; networking skills; personnel management; financial management; counselling skills; acting and performance skills; sales skills; sexual health specialism; entrepreneurial skills; and administrative skills. (2001, 122-123)

However, all but one participant said they would not try to “reconceptualise these skills in a different context” because they worried they would be stigmatized (Rickard 2001, 123).

Participants had held a variety of mainstream jobs, although these were usually lower-class and required little education. They described the transition as being challenging and isolated, and felt that there was a lack of role models (Rickard 2001). They also said they did not know many people who had quit sex work, speculating that this could be because people had to change social networks completely to avoid being tempted back to sex work by the money. However, despite admitting that the cash base of the industry made it difficult to save money, most participants reported having savings, insurance and financial plans, and some owned property (Rickard

2001). Thus, although her study sample was very small, Rickard's findings contradict stereotypes of sex workers as irresponsible and unskilled.

Peer-run programs such as that in Woodman's study, which identify sex work as inherently harmful, may not appeal to those who have experienced sex work differently. Although peer-run and other 'exit' programs offer mentorship, Rickard and Brown et al. identified a lack of informal mentorship networks by and for sex workers who view their work in a more positive light and/or as a career.²⁰

Career

While not always focusing on the transitioning process, some studies have highlighted the labour of sex work. Some have even described sex work as a career. Escoffier's 2007 study examined the career trajectory of male sex workers within the sex industry. He observed that although workers' entry into pornography is not often pre-meditated, once in the industry, porn actors carefully plan and strategize their careers. Most interesting in this article was the notion of the "retrogressive dynamic" in which the longer a worker stays in a sexual occupation, the less the worker makes (Escoffier 2007). Because of the "retrogressive dynamic," Escoffier found that part-time or occasional workers were able to maintain their success for longer than full time workers. Additionally, in order to maintain and prolong their careers, porn actors often supplemented their film appearances with other kinds of work in the sex industry, including touring as feature strippers, internet work, behind-the-scenes work, or escorting (Escoffier 2007). However, because "[o]nly escorting can provide an adequate full-time income," porn and

²⁰ As I have gathered from my own experience and through my involvement with various sex worker organizations, isolation is one of the greatest difficulties of sex work, especially for escorts and other independent workers who advertise over the Internet. Although there exist online forums for networking and discussions, such as the Toronto Escort Review Board and the Canadian Escort Review Board, there are few opportunities for in-person networking because stigma and criminalization make people reticent to self-identify as sex workers, especially in public. Thus, although the Internet can be useful in enabling anonymity, this can also be extremely isolating.

stripping tend to serve as advertising for high-priced escorting, which then becomes the foundation of male porn actors' career strategies (Escoffier 2007, 192).

Brewis and Linstead also looked at sex work as a career and emphasized that “[t]he sex industry exhibits much of the variety in organizational structure and job content that many other industries display, and demands a variety of skills of the woman who expects to make prostitution a successful career” (2000, 168). They listed many of the skills mentioned by Rickard, as well as education, counselling, property management, political skills and legal knowledge (Brewis and Linstead 2000). Although their study focused primarily on sex workers' identity construction, the authors did observe that age was a reason to leave sex work, and enumerated some career-prolonging strategies such as fetish and other specializations to counter the decreasing demand that accompanied increasing age. In particular, they noted that “few women who are not self-employed seem to stay in the business after the age of thirty-five” (Brewis and Linstead 2000, 175).

Contrastingly, Murphy and Venkatesh (2006) examined sex work as a career but framed it as a career to be avoided. They argued that the police crackdowns in New York city under the Giuliani administration resulted in an increase in indoor as compared to street-based sex work. This in turn resulted in sex workers staying longer in the field as they felt more secure and professional by virtue of working indoors (Murphy and Venkatesh 2006). In light of this, the authors suggested that social capital amassed in the sex industry was not transferable to the ‘straight’ (mainstream) world, due to criminalization and stigma, and “could ultimately stunt women’s motivations and abilities to exit” (Murphy and Venkatesh 2006, 150). The longer women stayed in sex work, the less attractive mainstream work seemed to become; mainstream employment was seen as a “step down” in autonomy, income level and sometimes satisfaction,

making the transition a potentially lengthy and circular process (Murphy and Venkatesh 2006). Weighing their options, women working indoors often continued to choose sex work. Murphy and Venkatesh identified an unmet need for immigration, employment and medical services amongst indoor workers, and noted that ‘exit’ programs tend to target street-based workers.

Scambler (2007) offered a temporal typology of sex work careers in his study, wherein he differentiated longer term workers from “opportunistic migrants”²¹ from Eastern Europe working in London as sex workers. Scambler defined “opportunistic migrants” as short term, discrete about their work, and working abroad towards a particular project or goal for which they want or need to make a large sum of money in a relatively short amount of time. In this regard, these workers both do and do not identify as sex workers. Scambler suggested that for migrant sex workers, “the disadvantage accruing through stigmatization is often ‘mixed in with’, even secondary to, exploitation and oppression” (2007, 1087), including the continuing prevalence of lower wages for women in the mainstream labour market.

Sex workers tell their stories

As I have discussed, a disproportionate number of studies focus on street-based or otherwise marginalized sex workers. In order to provide some balance, I wanted to include sex workers’ own stories. Although many biographies and auto-biographies of sex workers have been published, many focused only on the part of their lives when they were involved in the sex industry (see for example Hollander 2002; Cody 2006; Bailey 1982), likely because it was the most salacious and remains the most sellable.²² Obviously, (former) sex workers about whom

²¹ There is some debate about whether referring to sex workers, particularly migrants, as opportunists, could be seen as supporting negative stereotypes, unless all entrepreneurs are to be considered opportunists. However, Scambler’s work offers an interesting discussion about the relationship between length and purpose of involvement in the sex industry, to an individual’s identity.

²² Indeed, some of these have never really left, or have not transitioned into the mainstream. Some famous former sex workers are now self-employed in a similar manner if not in a similar activity, either as writers, activists or

books have been written differ from those who have participated in studies in various ways, not the least of which is the public exposure that accompanies publication.

Although Bobby Blake, an African-American gay porn star, succeeded in quitting sex work in his first, decisive try, his transition shares some commonalities with the studies I have discussed. During his career in pornography, he seems to have followed some of the career-prolonging strategies enumerated by Escoffier (2007), by including escorting and feature dancing in his repertoire. Because of his guest appearances at strip clubs and parties, his involvement in pornography was well publicized, and he was ‘out’ to his family and even his church. Blake had saved money and owned his home, but he still needed a job and worried about his reputation when applying for jobs (Blake and Gordon 2008). He worked as a nightclub security manager and then as a fitness trainer (a common post-porn career according to Escoffier 2007). Although his reputation actually helped in getting those jobs, false allegations were made against him for sexual misconduct towards youth at a gay sexual health education fundraiser. Blake’s reputation was eventually cleared, but the allegations had been widely publicized in the media (Blake and Gordon 2008). This slanderous turn of events suggests that for Blake, the stigma of sex work seems to have been a greater catalyst for discrimination than racism.²³

After quitting porn, Blake also became more involved with his family and went back to college. He also returned to the church, where before his porn career he had been a pastor, and now he does outreach and counsels people about their sexuality, and also works with community organizations promoting sexual health. However, despite being open about his involvement in porn, Blake counsels people not to emulate him, and ultimately regrets his own involvement in

performance artists. Examples of these are Xaviera Hollander (aka the Happy Hooker), Cynthia Payne and Annie Sprinkle.

²³ This contradicts Scambler’s (2007) insistence that stigma may be secondary to other kinds of oppression. This contradiction serves as yet another example of the variety of experiences of sex work and the variety of ways that former sex workers may be affected by interlocking marginalizing factors.

porn, even while he admits that he had many good experiences (Blake and Gordon 2008). That Blake's pornography career served as both a boon and a blemish in his life afterwards attests to the complexities of stigma. His story also shows how he anticipated, felt and internalized stigma, even though he had achieved success, fame and fortune in his porn career.

David Henry Sterry's story is very different from Bobby Blake's. Sterry only worked as an "industrial sex technician" (Sterry 2009, 4) for nine months. His inauspicious start in the industry came after he was found in a dumpster, at age seventeen, by the man who would become his pimp, after he had escaped a sexually violent man he had met on the street the previous night (Sterry 2003). While he was in college, Sterry was a sex worker in Hollywood, servicing the rich and eccentric. He became increasingly disturbed by his work and quit suddenly after he became violent with a customer (Sterry 2003). Sterry left Hollywood when he quit the industry, and felt intense internalised shame for the next twenty years (Sterry 2009). Finally, he worked through those experiences by writing an auto-biography about his time as a youth sex worker, which he described as "the worst (and the best) things that ever happened to me" (Sterry 2009, 3). Sterry went on to work as an actor and screenwriter.

Thus, differences in experiences, occupations, locations (indoor or outdoor) and length of time spent in the sex industry, appear to be related to variations in experiences of stigma and how it intersects with other marginalizing factors, as well as identification with sex work and professionalism. While many of studies have emphasized the influence of economic and structural factors on sex workers' experiences and transitions, regional law and culture are also important to consider.

Regionality

Manopaiboon et al.'s (2003) study focused on current and former female indoor sex workers

in Thailand, who (had) worked at a variety of establishments. Manopaiboon et al. found that women's transition out of sex work was primarily influenced by "their economic situation, their relationship with a steady partner, their attitudes towards sex work and their HIV/AIDS experience" (2003, 42). As in other studies in this chapter, economic factors were found to be most influential, and many women quit and re-entered several times. Because sex work is viewed as more acceptable in Thailand than in non-Buddhist nations, women did not worry about being stigmatized by their former career in sex work (Manopaiboon et al. 2003).

Interestingly, they instead "described stigma against former sex workers who had failed to accumulate material wealth" (Manopaiboon et al. 2003, 48). Despite the relative acceptability of sex work, Manopaiboon et al. described some participants as having internalized stigma. Participants recognized that their low level of education limited them to unskilled jobs, but expressed a preference for jobs requiring vocational training. The women found support networks to be greatly helpful, particularly in finding a job (Manopaiboon et al. 2003).

Unlike the other studies I looked at, which were from Western countries, the fact that sex work is generally accepted in Thailand (Manopaiboon et al. 2003) makes this study potentially less comparable to women's experiences in Canada. Indeed, sex workers' lives and work experiences are always affected by prevailing cultural attitudes, national and provincial or state legal and health regimes and economies, which reflect and affect women's status and local law enforcement. Mansson and Hedin (1999) described Sweden's regulation of prostitution as interventionist, and Scoular and O'Neill described the UK's response to prostitution as regulatory/corrective. The regulation of sex work can then be seen to be regionally specific. Canada's legal response to prostitution has been described as more punitive in nature (see Bruckert and Chabot 2010; Namaste 2005; Garro 2009). I only found four studies that took

place in Canada, one in British Columbia (Woodman 2000), two in Winnipeg (Brown et al. 2006; DeRiviere 2006) and one in Calgary (McIntyre 2002). Additionally, Winnipeg and Vancouver are notorious for low-income, drug-riddled and dangerous neighbourhoods, which may explain the studies' focus on low-income and street-based sex workers. That being said, dominant discourses, stereotypes and stigma were found to be influential to sex workers' experiences, and indeed, even with differences in regional regulation and occupation, there are many commonalities across the scholarship. Certainly the foremost commonality, regional and ontological differences aside, is the stigma of sex work.

Exiting survivor research: Common findings

In the literature, the stigma of sex work plays a role in many aspects of the transition, including the reasons for wanting to leave the industry, such as criminalisation, poor labour conditions and social exclusion, all of which are exacerbated by and perpetuate stigma. In this section, I analyze the common findings of studies across the spectrum by discussing the causes, difficulties, strategies, needs and processes of the transition out of sex work, and how stigma works in and through them.

The factors found to be most influential in inspiring a desire to leave the industry were criminalisation (McNaughton and Sanders 2007; Scoular and O'Neill 2007) labour conditions (McNaughton and Sanders 2007; Sanders 2007), and family-related concerns such as becoming involved in a steady relationship (Mansson and Hedin 1999; Manopaiboon et al. 2003; Sanders 2007) or having a child (Hedin and Mansson 2003; Mansson and Hedin 1999; McIntyre 2002). Also paramount in the literature was the "retrogressive dynamic," a term used by Escoffier which I here identify as the culmination of interlocking elements over time, consisting of age (Brewis and Linstead 2000; Escoffier 2007; Rickard 2001), changes in the industry

(McNaughton and Sanders 2007; Sanders 2007), and decreasing personal motivation for and/or commitment to the job (McNaughton and Sanders 2007; Rickard 2001; Sanders 2007).

Although incidences of violence and ill health are higher for street-based workers as compared to indoor workers, as many of the studies in this review concede, other important factors contributing to leaving sex work are violence or fear of violence (Hotaling et al. 2004; Mansson and Hedin 1999; McIntyre 2002; McNaughton and Sanders 2007; Sanders 2007), and health problems or concerns such as addiction (Mansson and Hedin 1999; McIntyre 2002; Sanders 2007), sexually transmitted infections or HIV (Manopaiboon et al. 2003).

However, as indoor work is likely to be more lucrative than outdoor work, the wage discrepancy between sex work and (accessible) mainstream jobs may make transitioning longer, more difficult or later for indoor workers as compared to outdoor workers (Murphy and Venkatesh 2006). Indeed, economic factors were universally emphasized as making the transition more difficult (Manopaiboon et al. 2003; McIntyre 2002; McNaughton and Sanders 2007; Murphy and Venkatesh 2006; Rickard 2001; Sanders 2007). The feminisation of poverty, including inadequacies in the welfare system specifically affecting women, was identified as a reason for engaging in sex work and as making it more difficult to leave it (McIntyre 2002; Rickard 2001; Scambler 2007).

As the sex industry is located outside the mainstream economically, morally and socially, social integration was discussed by many scholars. Forming new social networks was identified as being difficult but necessary to success in the transition (Hedin and Mansson 2003; McIntyre 2002; Rickard 2001). On a more general level, social exclusion contributed to entering and leaving the sex industry (Brown et al. 2006; Rickard 2001), and also exacerbated the difficulties of transitioning (Brown et al. 2006; McNaughton and Sanders 2007; Scoular and O'Neill 2007).

Sex workers' experiences of exclusion were found to be multifaceted, and included limited education (Manopaiboon et al. 2003), little or no experience in (Rabinovitch 2004; Sanders 2007), hence limited access to, mainstream jobs (Mansson and Hedin 1999). Additionally, habits and skills acquired in the sex industry were found to be inadequate, inapplicable or inappropriate in the mainstream workforce (McIntyre 2002; Rabinovitch 2004; Woodman 2000), or unlikely to be included in CVs (Sanders 2007; Rickard 2001) due to anticipated stigma. Difficulties in accessing social services (Brown et al. 2006; Mansson and Hedin 1999; McNaughton and Sanders 2007; Rabinovitch 2004; Scambler 2007) as well as isolation (Rickard 2001), due to social exclusion and stigma, were also enumerated as challenges in the transition.

How the above factors interlock with each other and additional factors such as gender, poverty, class, race, ethnicity and immigration status (Brown et al. 2006; Scambler 2007) as well as cultural, political and legal factors (Sanders 2007) affected sex workers to different extents and in different combinations depending on their particular occupation (Sanders 2007), and the length of their sex work career (Scambler 2007). This was often a two-way relationship. However, from the literature it seems that whatever the occupation, social capital acquired in the sex industry may not be transferable to the mainstream workforce (Murphy and Venkatesh 2006).

Despite these difficulties, several strategies for transitioning were identified in the literature. Sudden transitions were often in reaction to a particular event or events (Mansson and Hedin 1999; Sanders 2007) which, as discussed above, included violence, having a child or entering into a steady relationship. Another strategy was more long-term and involved a gradual cutting down of hours working, either in a 'natural progression' or through careful planning (McNaughton and Sanders 2007; Murphy and Venkatesh 2006; Sanders 2007). Many studies

found that transitioning was lengthy and took several tries (Manopaiboon et al. 2003; McIntyre 2002; McNaughton and Sanders 2007; Rabinovitch 2004; Sanders 2007).

The process of transitioning was often divided into stages. Combining the findings of various studies yields a three-stage transition process, beginning with the decision to leave the sex industry, followed by inhabiting a liminal situation while changing social circles, lifestyle strategies and work situation, and finally, settling into a mainstream job and lifestyle. How long the liminal situation lasts appears to vary between indoor and outdoor workers, particular occupations in the industry and occasional, part-time or full-time status. However, there is some disagreement in the literature about whether success, length and difficulty of the transition are more influenced by personal commitment (Hedin and Mansson 2003) or structural factors (Scoular and O'Neill 2007; Scambler 2007).

In addition to naming social exclusion as exacerbating the difficulties of the transition, the literature identified a co-extensive need/desire for social inclusion. This was manifested through the need for mentorship and support, which was found to be important (Woodman 2000), helpful (Hedin and Mansson 2003) and for many, lacking (Brown et al. 2006; Rickard 2001) during the transition. A yearning for more mainstream lifestyles (Oselin 1999; Rickard 2001) and being tired of maintaining the double identity often taken on to avoid stigma (Hedin and Mansson 2003), were part of the desire for social inclusion. Similarly, the mainstream occupations that appealed to sex workers often involved giving back to the community. These included jobs that specifically served other sex workers, either in the form of service, healthcare or community organizations (Blake and Gordon 2008; Brown et al. 2006; Hotaling et al. 2004; Rabinovitch 2004; Woodman 2000) or political activism (Rickard 2001).

My research

As the literature on transitioning out of sex work evinces, there is an array of opinions about whether sex work constitutes trauma or a career, both, or something in between. In Murphy and Venkatesh's study, 27% of the indoor workers reported "sex work as being the best job they have ever had" (2006, 142). This dramatically contrasts with the SAGE program clients, who described prostitution as exploitative and for survival (Hotaling et al. 2004).

With the exception of a few studies and biographies, much of the existing scholarship on transitioning focuses on street-based workers, criminalized indoor workers²⁴ inhabit a gap in the literature. Additionally, although some scholars posited working through trauma as the first or key part of the liminal situation (Hotaling et al. 2004; Rabinovitch 2004; Mansson and Hedin 1999; Oselin 2009; Ward and Roe-Sepowitz 2009), I believe this to be influenced by their chosen demographics. In focusing on criminalized indoor workers, my study differs from many existing studies which recruited their participants through 'exit' programs or other forms of health or outreach programs that focused primarily on street-based, 'survival' workers (see DeRiviere 2006; McIntyre 2002; McNaughton and Sanders 2007; Oselin 2009; Ward and Roe-Sepowitz 2009; Woodman 2000).

I have gathered from the existing literature that intersecting stigma, criminalization, gender, regional, economic and cultural factors play instrumental roles in the transition out of sex work. Stigma appears to be a universally influential factor, but what kind of stigma (perceived, felt, or internalised), how much, and for how long could vary considerably.

²⁴ As I will detail in my methodology chapter, criminalized indoor sex workers can be understood to be working indoors in criminalized occupations (not erotic dancing or pornography). According to O'Doherty (2007), 59.4 percent of indoor sex workers surveyed in Vancouver, who outnumber street workers four to one, had not experienced violence.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Having surveyed the literature, I now turn to a theoretical exploration of the transition. In this chapter, Ebaugh's (1988) theory of role exit will serve as the foundation of my theoretical framework, which I will tailor to sex work using Goffman's (1963) discussion of stigma. To add a feminist perspective to my theoretical tools, I will use MacKenzie and Stoljar's (2000) conception of "relational autonomy," in order to contextualize the transition out of sex work as a process shaped by social position and interactions, and as a vehicle for discussing the "interlocking nature of systems of domination" (Razack 1998, 132).

Throughout this chapter, I will be exploring the connections and relationships between Ebaugh, Goffman, MacKenzie and Stoljar and other theorists, and how they can be related to the transition out of sex work. Bruckert, Parent and Robitaille's (2003) classification of sex work as stigmatized labour will be instrumental in this endeavor. As such, I will be adapting the concept of role change to encompass various temporal and contextual manifestations of stigma. This will include a consideration of relationships between personal, political and practical aspects of transitioning. In short, my theoretical framework will be an adaptation of role change theory, using stigma and relational autonomy as supporting and shaping concepts.

Role exit theory

In Ebaugh's (1988) seminal sociological exploration of role exit, she asserts that role exit is a unique, complex, social and personal process that involves both socialization into a new role and disengagement from the previous role. Ebaugh's emphasis on disengagement makes role exit theory an appropriate choice for the temporal parameters of my study, which stipulate that participants must have transitioned or become involved in the process of transitioning out of sex work within the last five years. Since this temporal limitation could mean that individuals have not finished the transitioning process entirely, or have not completely settled into their new roles,

Ebaugh's insights on the social and personal aspects of role disengagement will be useful in my analysis.

Ebaugh defines role exit as the “process of disengagement from a role that is central to one's self-identity and the reestablishment of an identity in a new role that takes into account one's ex-role” (1988, 1). Here, role encompasses performance, lifestyle, social circle, and the corresponding social expectations and perceptions of that particular role. The prevalence of stereotypes about sex workers as victimized, drug addicted, helpless, etc. attests to how stigma has tainted the way sex workers are perceived. Stigma can then be seen as an integral part of the role of sex worker, and the transition out of it.

Ebaugh (1988) argues that in transitioning out of occupational, marital, life-style or deviant roles (her examples of deviant roles include alcoholics, sex workers,²⁵ and drug addicts), people continue to have to deal with stereotypes about and reactions to their former role, a role with which they also in some way continue to identify. She calls this a “hangover identity” (Ebaugh 1988, 5). The greater the intensity of involvement in the role, the more integrated it is with a person's identity. The commitment to the role, for example, whether a woman worked full-time or part-time as a sex worker, and how many years she was engaged in this work, is also a factor in degree of personal investment and thus, difficulty of transition. There can also be “side bets” (Ebaugh 1988, 17), indirect benefits that accrue over time in a role; in sex work, these might be social, emotional, sexual or schedule related benefits.

Ebaugh points out that “[w]hile it is inappropriate to equate self and role... a person's social roles are a major determinant of the conception of self and social identity” (1988, 20). Because “[P]ersonal identity is formed by the internalization of role expectations and the reactions of

²⁵ Although I disagree with Ebaugh's classification of sex work as deviance and think it should instead be classified as labour, the classification of sex work as deviance speaks to dominant discourses that stigmatize sex work. Viewed as a social perception, the description of sex work as deviance is regrettable but accurate.

others to one's position in the social structure" (Ebaugh 1988, 22), transition threatens self identity, and requires an adjustment to the conception of self. This negotiation and re-organization of old and new roles into one's conception of self is a process over the course of which an individual becomes more aware and acts more deliberately (Ebaugh 1988). Looking at Ebaugh's insights, role exit can be seen as a process that is at once common (many individuals experience various role changes throughout their lives), social (roles are affected by their social seating), and deeply personal (influenced by personal investment).

Two key areas in Ebaugh's study were the voluntariness of the transition and the centrality of the role. I am looking at women who have worked full time in the sex industry for a number of years, and who have orchestrated their own transitions. As such, Ebaugh's two key variables would appear to be key in my research as well. However, as I will explain, both of these variables are complicated by stigma and the constrained nature of choice in the neo-liberal labour market. This can be related to another significant variable in Ebaugh's study, the degree of control over the role exit, which she cited as relatively high for occupational changes. Although Ebaugh touched on sex work, she categorized it as a deviant role rather than an occupational one. Despite my rejection of this categorization, sex workers may not have as much control over their transition as other workers transitioning from one mainstream job to another because of stigma which, in effect, functions to categorize sex work as deviant instead of an occupation. Where Ebaugh's categorization of sex work as deviant becomes useful is in her discussion of the social desirability of the role change, which she ranked high for deviant roles. Indeed, 'exit' programs (see Oselin 2009; Ward and Roe-Sepowitz 2009) construct 'exiting' sex work as socially desirable, thus reinforcing stigmatic assumptions about sex work as an inherently violent and risky lifestyle.

Ebaugh also differentiated between individual, group and institutionalized exits. In an individual transition, as contrasted to the 'exit' programs mentioned in the previous chapter, the decision to transition is not tantamount to the individual defining sex work as a bad experience. This is of course possible, but not necessary to making the decision, unlike in programs focusing on recovery (as in Woodman 2000) or redefinition of self (as in Oselin 2009). Thus, although I am not comparing group and individual exits like Ebaugh did in her study, the individual nature of the transitions in my study is an important control.

According to Ebaugh (1988), changing a role in one area of life may lead to changes in other, related roles. She again singles out occupational changes, as not necessarily affecting other role changes (Ebaugh 1988). However, because stigma functions as a categorization of deviance, at the same time as sex work is labour, sex work can be seen to encompass two inter-related roles: stigmatized and occupational. To add to this list, I draw from Westcott, Baird and Cooper (2006), who emphasize the fundamentally intersectional nature of work. Westcott et al. (2006) argue that the contemporary realities of employment have become gravely misunderstood and misrepresented because of a lack of acknowledgement that people's roles as workers overlap with and affect other roles in their lives. In this respect, a sex worker can be seen to embody multiple and inter-related roles, including for example that of a service provider, stigmatized person, criminal and sexual deviant (which could include a non-normative sexual identity or practices related to and/or outside of sex work), community and family member, some or all of which may be affected by the transition. Westcott et al. (2006) further stipulate that in order to develop a meaningful understanding of work, power, social processes and gender, unpaid work and multiple roles must also be considered. Thus, the transition out of sex work must be looked

at as an inescapably multiple role change. Ebaugh (1988) describes multiple role changes as more complicated, involved and lengthy as compared to single role changes.

Also of interest in Ebaugh's list is the reversibility of the role change; as an occupation, sex work is notably easy to start and quit, which can draw out the transition (see Sanders 2007). Because "a sex worker can apply for a job in one day, work that night, and make enough money to pay a bill the next day" (Weldon 2006, 14), sex work has an appeal that can be difficult to leave behind (Fensterstock 2006). In relation to this, Ebaugh's stages of role change – doubt, seeking alternatives, turning points, and creating an "ex-role" identity – are useful reference points, but may be altered because of the strong possibility of "disorderliness" (Sanders 2007) in transitioning out of sex work.

Possible areas of interest in the later part of the transition are "presentation of self after the [role] exit, social reactions, intimacies, shifting friendships, relating to group members and other exes, and role residual" (Ebaugh 1988, 150). What stands out in this list is again the concept of "role residual," or "hangover identity," "the continued identity an individual holds with aspects of a previous role...[that] impacts on one's current role" (Ebaugh 1988, 174). In the transition out of sex work, an important part of the role residual would involve stigma.

Transitioning²⁶ out of a stigmatized role

According to Goffman, stigma is "an attribute that is deeply discrediting" (1963, 3). As an attribute that invites discrimination via the perception of its abnormality, stigma is not concrete, but rather reflective of the social mores of the time, place and audience. Stigmatized persons are perceived as abnormal, inferior and less than human, and as such, their opportunities in life may be reduced through discrimination (Goffman 1963). This puts sex workers in an unfavourable

²⁶ As I have previously noted, using the word 'exit' to describe leaving sex work has particular negative connotations. For this reason, although I continue to use Ebaugh as the key theorist in my theoretical framework, I am modifying her "role exit theory" into a 'transitioning out of sex work' theory.

position, given that “paid work is one of the most important social activities that individuals undertake” (Westcott et al. 2006, 6). According to Bruckert,

...the occupational stigma [of sex work] is constructed as a personal attribute so that the implications extend beyond the sphere of work and the label becomes a master status that has permanence across social *space*. It also adheres across *time* ...being an *ex*-sex worker is an identity marker that can be ascribed definitive value. (2011, 71; emphasis in original)

Bruckert, Parent and Robitaille (2003) found that the stigmatization and criminalization of sex work impacts women’s experience of labour as well their personal lives. On this basis, they classified sex work as stigmatised labour (Bruckert et al. 2003). This classification can be seen to enhance both the multiplicity and the centrality of sex work as a role.

Goffman (1963) describes stigma as not so much a role but a perspective borne of social interaction. In this regard, stigmatized persons are likely to have internalized prevailing social norms, such that stigmatized groups can reinforce stigmas and stereotypes about other groups (i.e. a disabled person can be racist), and internalize the stigma against their own group. The internalization of stigma and social norms can result in feelings of shame and social exclusion. Hannem and Bruckert suggest that “the ‘marked’ *live* stigmatic assumptions in profound ways” and further, that “anticipated stigma and a deeply felt realization of ‘otherness’ have a profound effect on how ‘marked’ social actors interact with others in their daily lives” (2011, 11; emphasis in original). The effects of this ‘otherness’ engendered by stigma include non-disclosure (living a double life), isolation and internalized stigma.

Goffman (1963) further distinguishes stigmatized persons who are “discreditable” from those who are “discredited,” the former having a stigma that is not readily apparent, the latter being visually obvious. This is the crux of the question of disclosure: although sex workers know that their work renders them “discreditable,” they may not want to be publicly “discredited.” Even former sex workers risk being “discredited” by disclosing their previous occupation.

With respect to managing stigma and disclosure, sex workers are “highly cognisant of the stigmatic assumptions of outsiders and appreciate[d] that the nature of the stigma is neither straightforward nor self-evident” (Bruckert 2011, 72). Applying this awareness to transitioning, Bruckert et al. noted that should “[sex] workers want to change careers, it is difficult for them to identify the skills they have acquired, although... they can be numerous and very valuable on the job market” (2003, 55). Thus, the difficulty of identifying or describing skills relates to considerations of disclosure, which suggests that the stigma of sex work may inform subsequent occupations in various ways. Reincorporating Ebaugh and Goffman here might result in a portrayal of sex workers as stigmatized persons with a questionable degree of control over their transitions into mainstream employment. However, in order to avoid this grim and overly simplistic assumption, I turn instead to what any person faced with few options in a disadvantaged social position might see as the only viable solution: strategy.

Deriving originally from the art and science of military command (*Webster’s* 1984), strategy connotes rigorous method, cleverness, adaptation, creative problem-solving, and careful planning. This is quite precisely the opposite of the imagined lifestyle, and life course, of a stereotypical sex worker, which might be described as haphazard, marginalized, victimized, ambitionless, witless.²⁷ To categorize sex workers as employing strategy in any stage of their transition, in any aspect of their work in the sex industry, or indeed in any facet of their lives at all, is to challenge this stereotype. Cohen suggests:

...that through a focus on “deviant” practice we are witness to the power of those at the bottom, whose everyday life decisions challenge, or at least counter, the basic normative assumptions of a society intent on protecting structural and social inequalities under the guise of some normal and natural order to life. (2004, 33)

²⁷ Although many stereotypical images of sex workers that fit these descriptors abound, especially on TV crime shows, perhaps the most outrageous recent outburst of consent-negation, stereotypes and even hatred of sex workers has been in response to the Himel decision (see for example Kay 2010).

Here, Cohen proposes a new methodology of examining and understanding deviance as a form of resistance to dominant norms. Thus, recording sex workers' strategies in their transitions out of the industry can serve in disrupting the 'natural order' that would assume and insist that they remain at the bottom, that is, stigmatized and socially excluded.

When considered as a strategy, or part of a plan, the question of disclosure becomes a tactic of personal, professional or political advancement. These tactics could progress towards specific goals: non-disclosure may advance a mainstream career; disclosure may advance the sex workers' movement by challenging stereotypes and stigma; partial disclosure, arguably the most difficult *and* strategic option, could have the potential to advance both of these goals. Disclosure strategies may change in the transition. For example, if a woman was engaged in sex work in her 20s and stopped disclosing after she quit, she may feel less and less likely to be recognized by people from her former role as she ages, and may hardly worry about it by the time she reaches her 50s. Although this scope of time is outside the purview of my research, which is limited to women who have been engaged in transitioning out of sex work in the last five years, this example illustrates that in the transition out of stigmatized labour, just as identity is mutable, stigma is sticky but not static.

Transitioning out of stigmatized labour into the neo-liberal labour market

At this point, strategy becomes an important consideration in finding employment outside the sex industry. Strategy could be considered in conversation with Ebaugh's stages of role change, likely as part of seeking alternatives, and with the variables, particularly degree of control. As evinced by the ongoing feminist and scholarly debates about sex work discussed in Chapter 1, sex workers' degree of control, or agency, continues to be heartily contested. However, the contemporary mainstream labour market has also become a site of increasingly contested agency

(see Vosko 2000). If the labour market can be characterized as a struggle between choice and degree of control, this struggle can in turn be looked at as strategy's inspiration and symbiotic other, challenge. In this respect, stigma, role change, mainstream employability and job availability can all be seen as challenges in the transition out of sex work.

MacKenzie and Stoljar (2000) address the tension between challenges and strategies, especially as experienced by women, in their conception of "relational autonomy." The concept of relational autonomy can be applied to all workers as a more realistic alternative to the paradigm of the 'self-made' man. For MacKenzie and Stoljar, relational autonomy is built on "the conviction that persons are socially embedded and that agents' identities are formed within the context of social relationships and shaped by a complex of intersecting social determinants, such as race, class, gender, and ethnicity" (2000, 4). Applying relational autonomy to sex workers suggests that in choosing sex work, they are both conforming to and subverting gender and sexual norms, as part of a strategy to address contextual and temporal challenges relating to employment and economic status; this is a choice that will likely impact future choices as well. Thus, it seems equally important to acknowledge "workers as knowledgeable and capable agents" (Giddens 1982, 40) as to acknowledge the contingent nature of choice of occupation in the contemporary labour market. Bruckert suggests that besides considering the effects of stigma, sex workers are aware of their position as labourers, and that "like other individuals who sell their labour power, they may be exploited workers" (2011, 73). In other words, they are aware of the relational nature of their autonomy, making strategy all the more relevant as a practical (or tactical) advantage in the process of transitioning.

Although the concepts of choice and agency have long been debated in relation to sex work, critics of neo-liberalism have begun to question the quality, conditions and limitations of the

choices and agency of all workers (see Gordon 2004; MacPhail and Bowles 2008; Westcott et al. 2006). Neo-liberalism, which values private enterprise, individual autonomy and market freedom, has resulted in Western states significantly having reduced and reformed social services and the public sector since the 1980s (Iltan 2009), as well as having moved away from directly providing income equality and stable employment conditions (Iltan, Oliver and O'Connor 2007). The contemporary job market can then be seen as an example of how the “micropolitics of everyday life” are linked to “the macropolitics of global economic and political processes” (Mohanty 2003, 230) and play out in the lives of social actors.

In Canada, the adoption of neo-liberalism has resulted in new methods of social exclusion, including an increased proportion of part-time or contract-based employment (without benefits and stability), as well as reduced margins of eligibility for welfare and disability benefits (Iltan et al. 2007). Concurrently, neo-liberalism has redefined “women as active agents who are responsible for solving problems in an individualized manner” (Iltan et al. 2007, 76). In seeking to augment individual active agency, neo-liberal policies view unemployment or underemployment as an individual problem instead of a structural one (Iltan et al. 2007), when practically speaking, it is both. With these considerations, the relationships between neo-liberalism and the job market on a macro scale, and relational autonomy, stigma and strategy on a micro scale, must be viewed as dynamic in the transition out of sex work. These relationships are dynamic because the transition is a process, during which time any one of a number of factors that affect an individual’s autonomy, such as the job market, or entering or leaving relationship, having a child, health conditions, etc., could impact the speed, direction and trajectory of the transition.

Returning to MacKenzie and Stoljar, relational autonomy speaks to the reality of the experiences of women workers in the neo-liberal labour and political climate which, through the over-valuation of individual achievement at the expense of structural considerations, results in many marginalised groups being socially excluded. Looking at who is excluded under neo-liberal policies and labour market trends – women, immigrants, the poor, the disabled, people of colour, single mothers, etc. – reveals that the “personification of neo-liberalized social inclusion” (Gingrich 2008, 384), the ideal “citizen-worker” (Dobrowolsky and Lister 2005) is white, able-bodied, heterosexual and male.

Green (2005) describes “work culture,” a practice that began to be embraced by corporate culture in the 1980s, as a social-relations model of culture that purports to strengthen and improve the workplace through the regulation of appearance and behavior. Modeled on and perpetuating a white, male norm, work culture is portrayed as more progressive because of its emphasis on teamwork and a flattened corporate structure. The flattened corporate structure permits work culture to eschew some of the constraints of what might be considered standard employment practices, notably seniority and stability, by making success more accessible to those who “fit in” (Green 2005). In this respect, gender, race, class and cultural capital become determinants of success within work culture, and hierarchies within an institution come to parallel class divides.²⁸ As work culture becomes an increasingly important determinant of success, outsiders are relegated to the margins of the institution (Green 2005). Green’s (2005) study additionally found that, because the teamwork and flattened structure rhetoric render discrimination in work culture virtually invisible, discrimination in work culture is often met with judicial deference. This suggests that even in an era of equal opportunity employment,

²⁸ The concept of success itself arguably has class and racial connotations, as we saw in Oselin’s (2009) study of the Prostitution Rehabilitation Program, wherein participants’ success was hinged on their conformity to white, middle class, heterosexual femininity.

structural sexism, racism and classism continue to condition women's choices when it comes to employment. There is evidence that employment equity has not been significantly successful in Canada, especially for "[a]boriginal peoples, persons with disabilities [and] visible minorities" (Ilcan et al. 2007, 78) because despite having been legislated, there is a lack of enforcement measures due to the decentralized regulation of neo-liberalism. Even in the public sector, women enjoy less job mobility than do men (Ilcan et al. 2007).

While the private and public sectors remain a 'boys' club,' as a site of mainly female gender performance, sex work can be seen as a 'girls' club' – one of the few industries wherein women outnumber and out-earn men. However, the 'boys' club' and the 'girls' club' are both similar and symbiotic. According to Scambler (2007, 1088),

If sex work is indirectly fuelled by the strategic action of an increasingly globalized and *licit* capitalist-executive, the strategic action of the sex industry's own *illicit* and increasingly globalized cabal of 'impresarios' operating in the informal economy, mimics and caricatures more formal relations of class.

This suggests two things. First, that the sex industry, like the rest of Western society, has been shaped by intersecting racial, class and gender, aesthetic and behavioural expectations modeled on (and catering to) a white, male norm. In the sex industry, this has formed a hierarchy of desire, with white, thin, women, as embodiments of the ideal Western beauty, at the top.²⁹ As Brown (2005, 75-6) notes,

Class is, at least in the dominant racist logic of contemporary belief systems, a matter of race rather than just a matter of power... In other words, skin colour and gender behaviour have become signs of class rank in that they are indicative of an individual's ability or inability to conform to dominant white standards of conduct.

²⁹ The white beauty standard is enforced directly and indirectly in higher-income and higher-class (in other words, considered less discreditable) occupations in the sex industry. In strip clubs where I have worked for example, this standard is enforced indirectly by clubs preferentially hiring thin women, and directly by management establishing and enforcing racial quotas that severely limit the hiring of black women. At the bottom of the hierarchy are a correspondingly disproportionate amount of racialized, aboriginal and transsexual workers (see Namaste 2005; Yee 2009).

Second, and connecting Brown's, Scambler's and Green's insights, experiences of racism, classism, ableism, (hetero)sexism, and ethnocentrism, etc., are neither necessarily limited to, nor more or less likely to occur in either the sex industry or the mainstream labour force.

However, for sex workers, stigma is manifested in, through and with other intersecting marginalizing factors. While MacKenzie and Stoljar describe relational autonomy as a feminist response to the 'self-made' man, because sex workers inhabit a marginal and stigmatized space as labourers, they may require more strategy than other workers changing jobs within the mainstream labour market. Indeed, if sex workers find that they do not possess transferable skills or experience, they would in effect need to re-make themselves. In this respect, the relationality of their autonomy, as conditioned by stigma and other intersecting marginalizing factors, and shaped by strategy, may result in their becoming 'self-made' women. Of course, MacKenzie and Stoljar would insist that no one lives in true isolation, and several scholars found that sex workers seek support from their communities during the transition (see Brown et al. 2006; Hedin and Mansson 2003; Rickard 2001). However, while it was suggested that community support was helpful, and even instrumental, to the transition, it was not always found to be adequate or available. Strategy can then be seen as a tool to evaluate and work within the limits of relational autonomy, deployed in response to need and context.

In an analysis of the transition out of sex work then, it is imperative to consider how structures, ideologies and attributes interact to form "multiple and intersecting systems of power that largely dictate our life chances" (Cohen 1997, 440). Indeed, this sentiment closely resembles Goffman's description of stigma as limiting life chances. However, while it is important to acknowledge and understand the impact of stigma and structural oppressions, it is also important to emphasize that although these factors may limit chances or choices in life, they

do not dictate them. This is why the discussion must be expanded to include narratives that differ from existing literature that has concluded, rather bleakly, that sex work diminishes lifelong human capital potential (see in particular DeRiviere 2006).³⁰ Nonetheless, it is crucial to look at how structures such as the labour market, the legal system, the welfare system and governments interact with, perpetuate and are shaped by the ideologies of stigma, neo-liberalism, citizenship and heteronormativity, with a feminist lens that also considers the intersections of gender, class, race, ability, occupation, immigration status and presentation.³¹ Thus, while not dictating its outcome, intersecting structures, attributes and ideologies can shape the transition by limiting possibilities, which in turn influence the challenges and strategies therein. All of these considerations together are in effect just what makes autonomy relational.

Bourdieu can be useful for my purposes here in melding relational autonomy (as challenged/limited agency) with strategy and stigma in thinking about the transition out of sex work. In his discussion of social space and class divisions, Bourdieu (1985, 734) suggests that:

The social world is, to a large extent, what the agents make of it, at each moment; but they have no chance of un-making and re-making it except on the basis of realistic knowledge of what it is and what they can do with it from the position they occupy within it.

Thus, while sex workers' agency may be limited by stigma and other social and structural factors over the course of their transition, they can employ relational autonomy by exercising choice and agency through strategy. Cohen's description of collective awareness of social position resembles relational autonomy with transformative potential; she insists that the radical potential

³⁰ At the same time, I acknowledge that the demographic in my study inhabits a more privileged position than the street-based 'survival' sex workers in DeRiviere's (2006) and other trauma-based studies. However, as I have already pointed out, street-based workers make up a minority of the sex worker population, yet they are over-represented in the literature. Hence, my aim is not to dismiss the experiences of extremely marginalized sex workers, but rather to insist that their experiences should not be generalized to apply to all sex workers.

³¹ I use presentation rather than sexual or gender orientation because I believe visible traits and noticeable behaviours to be more influential in an employment context than less immediately obvious (if truer) aspects of a person's identity. Following Goffman's comparison between the discreditable and the discredited, a person's politics, beliefs or desires are only an issue in an employment context if they are visually obvious or otherwise known.

of liberatory movements “rests on [their] ability to advance strategically oriented political identities arising from a more nuanced understanding of power” (1997, 458). On an individual level, what can be taken from both Cohen and Bourdieu, and what has indeed been suggested by Bruckert, is that an awareness of systems of oppression and social seating, which sex workers derive from their experiences of stigma, is instrumental in the strategy of the transition.

Summary: Theory for transitioning out of sex work

In this chapter, I have taken from Ebaugh’s role exit theory what can be applied to the transition out of sex work, namely her insights on the relationship between role change and identity, as well as some of her variables, in particular the centrality of the role, and the reversibility, social desirability and multiplicity of the role change. However, as I have discussed, the degree of control over the transition is complicated by the harsh realities of stigma and the neo-liberal labour market.

In order to suit Ebaugh’s theory to the transition out of sex work, I have added Goffman, Bruckert, Hannem, Parent and Robitaille to account for the influence of stigma. I have used stigma as a springboard to theorize strategy, in order to position sex workers as active agents. Stigma, strategy, and Ebaugh’s variables, stages and identity-related aspects in the transition are of course inter-related and affected by additional factors. The relationship between internal factors (such as internalized stigma, strategy, and decisions involving disclosure) and external factors (such as the labour market) in the transition has been incorporated via MacKenzie and Stoljar’s conception of relational autonomy, supplemented with feminist intersectional analysis to account for the influence of personal attributes such as gender, race, ability, class and nationality. In short, I have conceptualized the transition out of sex work as a socially embedded work trajectory influenced by stigma.

Having drawn theoretical links between role transition, stigmatized labour, and relational autonomy, I have adapted these concepts into a set of tools that will enable me to unpack my findings and ‘make sense’ of my data. Now that I am equipped with these tools, I will proceed to explaining how I gathered my data and how the project came together.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Throughout this project, I was careful to be responsible in my position as a researcher in the sex worker community, whose stories are often misrepresented in academia (see Weldon 2006). Although I spent a few years working in the sex industry myself, sex work comprises a wide range of experiences and occupations, from webcam girls to pornography actresses to street-based workers. Sex workers then, like women or feminists, make up a widely varied and sometimes disconnected group that is difficult and unproductive to essentialize. Thus, even though it can be tempting and useful to claim ‘insider’ status, I have not taken this privilege lightly. With a view to treating my communities and research participants respectfully and professionally, I have looked to several specialists in the fields of sex work, insider research, and interview-based research. In this chapter, I will discuss some of these scholars’ research methods and philosophies, and how these have informed my project. I will then describe my own methodology, from participant recruitment to data analysis.

Sex work research methodology: A discussion

Rickard notes that “while gender and economics are central” feminists should also keep in mind the role of the politics of pleasure when looking at sex workers’ stories (2001, 127). This insight has proved useful throughout this project, as sexuality and erotic enjoyment repeatedly came up in participants’ narratives. Taking note of this, I included sexuality in my analysis chapter. Other scholars have also commented on the complexity of the relationship between sexuality and labour, both in the sex industry and in women’s work generally (see Bruckert and Parent 2006; Frank 2002; Hochschild 2003). As such, my discussion of sexuality acknowledges that personal sexuality does not exist in a vacuum – indeed, participants found that some of their experiences in sex work affected their personal sex lives.

Kovach (2005) also recommends that researchers should acknowledge the subjective nature of experience, and emphasizes that in researching one's own community, it is important to proceed ethically, respectfully and accountably, in order to produce research that is ultimately useful to the community. Kovach (2005) describes this careful research practice as creating space instead of merely taking space.

In the spirit of creating space, I used an intersectional feminist framework in the construction, execution and analysis of my research project. Morris and Bunjun (2007) describe intersectional feminist frameworks as ways of looking at women's lives holistically, paying attention to the simultaneity of oppression and privilege, the complexity and diversity of communities, with a view to producing respectful and representative research. Intersectional feminist frameworks reflect feminist principles, including but not limited to accountability, advocacy, equality and inclusion (Morris and Bunjun 2007). One feminist principle that I would like to highlight with this project is that of choice, especially given feminism's history of disregarding or discrediting sex workers' capacity to make choices for themselves³² (see Ferguson 1984; Kinnell 2002). In light of this regrettable history, I think is essential to keep choice at the forefront of any discussion or research about sex work:

The principle of choice means that we respect, support and advocate for women's individual and collective right to make out own decisions about our own bodies, our families, our jobs and our lives. The right to choose is integral to the feminist pursuit of social, legal, political, economic and cultural equality for women. (DisAbled Women's Network Ontario, quoted in Morris and Bunjun 2007, 19)

As part of my intersectional feminist framework, I used a feminist epistemology, which "can be regarded as the branch of social epistemology that investigates the influence of *socially*

³² At a panel in November 2010, Emilie Laliberte, the director of Stella, a Montreal sex worker rights organization, referred to self-proclaimed 'abolitionist' feminists, who have long been trying to completely eradicate sex work, as the 'anti-choice' movement. She explained that this was because the name 'abolitionist' alluded to slavery in a way that positioned sex work as always inherently violent, and discounted any possibility for sex workers having choice or agency at all.

constructed conceptions and norms of gender and gender-specific interests and experiences on the production of knowledge” (Anderson 1995, 54; emphasis in original) as my point of departure. I was also careful to attend to the possibility of the particular influences of class, race, age, and ability, and how they intersect, in order to better understand the hierarchies created and perpetuated by dominant discourses. In combining an intersectional feminist epistemology with a sex work ontology, that is, the recognition that sex work is labour (and the implicit affirmation of the feminist principle of choice), I undertook this project with due consideration for the sex worker community. A failure to acknowledge the labour of sex work reduces sex workers to deviants and victims, which I believe to be both harmful and whorephobic.

Research project parameters

As I reviewed the existing literature in sociology, psychology, women’s studies, and other fields, I found the transition out of indoor sex work to be under-explored. In response to this gap, I concentrated on the transitions of criminalized indoor workers. I focussed on women because most sex workers are women,³³ which suggests that their choice to enter the sex industry has at least in part been influenced by their gender. Although the term ‘sex worker’ refers to jobs across the sex industry, for my purposes here, it refers particularly to criminalized³⁴ indoor workers, meaning women who worked as escorts, dominatrices or massage parlour attendants, selling their sexual services by time.

³³ Although criminalization drives a large portion of the sex industry underground, making it very difficult to know how many people are sex workers, Allman (1999) estimates that 80% of sex workers in Canada are women.

³⁴ Section 210 of the Criminal Code prohibits Bawdy Houses, which are defined as any site used for prostitution or the “practice of acts of indecency,” which means it is illegal to work indoors. Section 211 prohibits Transporting a person to a bawdy house. Section 212 prohibits Procuring, including living wholly or in part on the avails of prostitution, effectively criminalizing partners and dependants of sex workers, managers and agency owners and preventing sex workers from sharing clients. Finally, Section 213 prohibits Communication for the purposes of prostitution, which means soliciting in any public place, including cell phones, the Internet, hotel lobbies, bars, and of course, the street (*Criminal Code of Canada* 1985).

Comparably less vulnerable to violence than street-based workers (O’Doherty 2007), criminalized indoor workers also occupy a relatively private space in the sex industry as compared to street-based workers, strippers or porn actresses, which enables them to be more discreet about their work if they so choose. Unlike strippers, porn actresses or phone/internet workers however, criminalized indoor workers are vulnerable to being marked as criminals in addition to being stigmatized as sex workers, and having a criminal record³⁵ may affect their employment choices outside the sex industry.

Turning now to the latter part of the transition, it is necessary to define my use of the term ‘mainstream.’ According to Brown et al. (2006), sex workers may gravitate towards social work or otherwise socially oriented jobs, and indeed, several of my participants were employed in such fields. While social work, harm reduction, and other non-governmental organizations are not necessarily conventional in their politics, they can be regarded as mainstream by virtue of their being legal, daytime jobs that provide a salary, an hourly wage or a contract subject to labour regulation. Although there are many mainstream jobs that fall outside of this purview, including bartending (a night-time job) and self-employment (no salary or fixed hours), all ten participants worked in the day in their current principal occupation. As I will discuss in my findings chapter, ‘9-5’ type jobs appealed to some participants because of the labour protections and daytime schedule they provided. Hence, my use of the term ‘mainstream’ in relation to jobs was also shaped by my participants. Loosely however, ‘mainstream job’ is used to contrast against elements particular to sex industry occupations, notably criminalization and stigma – as Bertha

³⁵ It should be noted however that indoor workers are much less vulnerable to arrest than street-based workers. According to a government study of Canada’s prostitution laws, “communicating offenses [communicating in public for the purposes of prostitution] represent more than 90% of all prostitution related offenses” (Canada 2006, 52). Further, “68% of women [workers] charged were found guilty under section 213, while 70% of charges were stayed or withdrawn for men [clients] charged under the same provision” (Canada 2006, 52). These discrepancies in the application of the laws clearly demonstrate sexism and how it intersects with classism and racism in the fact that those who are most often punished are also already the most marginalized.

said, “*I don’t know what people not in the underground call their work--what are they, the above ground?*” (para. 174).

Recruitment process

To recruit participants for this project, I disseminated an email invitation to participate through various networks in the sex industry, the NGO sector and the healthcare sector, and through the networks of sex worker organizations, in Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto. A few of the women invited friends to participate. I also put up a poster at an adult store in Ottawa, and on the Ottawa jobs offered section of the popular online classifieds site, Craigslist.

Since I am couching sex work in contemporary Canadian labour trends, a recent time frame was important to the relevance of this exploration. In this regard, and also because more recent memories are likely to be more accurate, women who had transitioned within the last five years were targeted. I also tailored my recruitment text to attract participants who had worked primarily as adults, in order to distance the project from other studies that examine the ‘exit’ processes of youth ‘survival’ sex workers.

Because this was a qualitative study, I was not concerned with getting a representative cross-sample of the sex worker population. Shaver (2005) has observed that “...the size and boundaries of the [sex worker] population are unknown, so it is extremely difficult to get a representative sample” (Shaver 2005, 296). As well, “bias can be introduced during targeted sampling when the most visible participants (such as street workers) are oversampled and the least visible (those who work inside) undersampled” (Shaver 2005, 296). Hence, in order to balance this kind of targeted sampling, I chose to showcase the voices and experiences of indoor workers. Because I advertised through sex worker activist networks (although not exclusively), I might have gotten an over-representation of politically active women.

Initially, I had wanted to focus specifically on former escorts, however I soon realized that a normative framework of transitioning directly out of sex work and into a mainstream job was not consistent with sex workers' experiences. Although my invitation to participate in the research had received numerous positive responses, some of the women had worked in other sectors than escorting, such as massage, and many had not entirely stopped working, but rather kept a few regular clients in addition to a full-time, mainstream job, or school. Taking these trends into consideration, I expanded the parameters of the study to include all criminalized indoor workers, because despite some variation in the level of physical involvement with clients, these jobs share similar levels of stigma and criminalization. I also decided to include the women who had kept a few regular clients, following Rickard's (2001) suggestion that (former) sex workers may not view occasionally seeing regular clients as continuing in sex work, and that feminists should respect this self-definition. Finally, I included those who were in school, because it consisted of a mainstream activity that took up as much time as a job, and took place during the day.

Ethics process

Because of the changes to the research parameters discussed above, the ethics application was a two step process. My initial ethics application, which I submitted for a full REB review in March 2010, included a list of psychologists in Ottawa, Montreal and Toronto in case participants found any of the material in the interview triggering (they did not). I received the ethics approval notice on July 16th, 2010. After I began the recruitment process, I decided to expand the study parameters. Shortly thereafter, I submitted changes to the project parameters and the interview guide. These changes were approved on September 13th, 2010, and because they were relatively minor, were covered by the ethics approval notice granted in July 2010 (see appendix A).

Demographic

All ten participants were cis-gendered female (the recruitment letter had requested female-identified participants), and only one participant was a racialized woman. Their ages ranged from 28 to 52, with a median of 35.4 years old. They had left the sex industry between one and three times, over spans of 3 to 23 years. Their jobs in the sex industry had included escorting, domination, erotic massage, erotic dance, street-based work and web-cam work. Outside the sex industry, participants worked in the service industry, healthcare, social work, education and art. Short biographies of the participants will be featured in the following chapter.

Interviews

Interview format

Semi-structured interviews are optimal for exploratory research, as they allow for new and unanticipated information to emerge. Barriball and While describe semi-structured interviews as “well suited for the exploration of the perceptions and opinions of respondents regarding complex and sometimes sensitive issues and enable probing for more information and clarification of answers” (1994, 330). As their research shared a focus on labour and career development, Barribal and While’s more particular reasons for using semi-structured interviews also informed my methodology, in that “the varied professional, educational and personal histories of the sample group precluded the use of a standardized interview schedule” (1994, 330). I anticipated my participants’ experiences would be diverse and indeed, although my sample size was relatively small (n=10), my participants hailed from a wide range of ages, and personal and professional backgrounds.

I conducted, digitally recorded and transcribed the interviews verbatim, between September and December 2010. Because this study involved a criminalized and stigmatized population,

protecting participants' anonymity was paramount. To this end, all identifying details were removed, including names, workplaces, neighbourhoods, and recognizable speech patterns. Some participants chose their own pseudonyms, while others elected to have their pseudonyms assigned. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and two hours, and took place in Toronto and Montreal, at locations and times chosen by participants (unfortunately, there were no respondents from the Ottawa area). Participants were compensated \$50 for their time.

Interview content

Rickard points out that “like any methodology, life-history interpretation and analysis is governed by the questions that researchers ask” (2001, 115). As this study was undertaken from a labour perspective, I focussed on the women's experiences of work, rather than for example violence or drugs. Apart from deviating from my focus on labour, I believe asking former sex workers about violence they encountered at work un-necessarily forces them to re-visit unpleasant experiences, and may also skew the data by creating a false impression that their experiences were primarily violent.

I developed my interview guide (see appendix B) around my research questions as well as some of the themes emerging from the literature. In the interviews, I invited participants to tell their stories of transitioning out of sex work, including why and how they did what they did, and how they felt about it. Interviews began with an open invitation to speak, then moved to follow-up questions about the transition, before leaving the sex industry, the process itself, and after leaving the industry. Participants were then asked about their experiences of stigma and their thoughts about the sex industry. I also asked them about to compare working in the sex industry to working in a mainstream job. Towards the end of the interviews, participants gave a timeline of the jobs they had held since they first started doing sex work. The questions at the beginning

of the interviews were very open ended, and became more specific over the course of the interview, ending with short-answer demographic questions (about age, sexuality, etc.).

Data analysis

In order to take the full spectrum of participants' experiences into account while simultaneously addressing the divergence of findings and opinions in the literature, I used a dialectical approach. According to Guba and Lincoln, the hermeneutic dialectic process is "interpretive in character, and...represents a comparison and contrast of divergent views with a view to achieving a higher-level synthesis of them all" (1989, 149). Rickard's (2001) study provided me with a good example of a hermeneutic dialectical approach to qualitative research about sex workers. Her methodology involved loosely structured, open ended interviews with sex workers in the UK, which she followed up by building feminist theory around these oral histories (Rickard, 2001). Similarly, I wrote my theoretical framework while the interviews were underway, in order to include themes emerging from existing literature and applicable theories, as well as from the interviews themselves.

The data from the interviews was coded for analysis using N-VIVO software. The coding itself was a dynamic process: some codes emerged from the literature and theory but others were identified from the interviews. This allowed for both expected and unexpected codes. Once all transcripts were coded (vertical reading) they were read horizontally for common themes. Expected themes, which were coded 'down' from the literature and theory, included stigma (although participants talked more expansively about stigma than anticipated), disclosure, job trajectory, reasons for transitioning, and challenges and changes participants encountered on this journey. Unexpected themes, which were coded 'up' from the data, included how stigma and transitioning affected and were affected by relationships (for example with partners, community

and clients), how sex work and the transition out of it affected participants' sexuality, and their relationships to work and money. The themes that recurred most frequently were then divided into sub-categories. For example, stigma was separated into the contexts in which participants had experienced it: in mainstream job hunting, in public, from feminists, in relation to housing, about their job while they were working full time in the sex industry, from mainstream colleagues, at school, from their communities, in the healthcare system, and internalized stigma or shame; findings that did not fit into any of these categories were sorted under the general stigma category. Unfortunately, and as the expansiveness of this list suggests, not all the findings or codes were relevant to my focus on the transition (for a full list of codes, see appendix C).

After looking at the themes once the data was coded, I separated them into two categories: practical aspects of the transition, such as why and how participants transitioned from sex work into the mainstream labour market, and concepts that could be related to my theoretical framework. In my findings chapter, I present the practical aspects thematically. My analysis chapter, which draws on the theoretical framework to 'make sense' of the data, will examine the meaning of the transition as a multi-faceted shift in identity.

Concluding comments

In this chapter, I have discussed my methodology for this research project, including my rationale for the project, its parameters, the recruitment process, the interviews and the coding process. Now that I have explained how I conducted this study, I will introduce my participants.

CHAPTER 4: THE WOMEN

In addition to expressing my gratefulness for making time in their busy lives to meet and talk openly with me, I would like to introduce the women who participated in this study in all their complexity and individuality before dissecting and analyzing their stories, as the practice of qualitative research dictates. Having worked in a range of sectors in the sex industry, these women were not victims, they were not survivors, they were not hardened; in short, there was not a Greek tragedy in sight. Rather, they were adventurous, ambitious, courageous, proud, analytical and funny. In their professional lives in the sex industry, these women had made fantasies come to life. They had navigated the stigmatized and often isolating territory of sex work and made it their own. Many of them also bravely confronted stigmatic assumptions, educated people about what sex work is really like on a daily basis, and some even listed sex work on their resume when looking for mainstream jobs. For some, the interviews provided a space to reflect on things they had not had much time to think about before, and for many, it was an opportunity to have their experiences and successes recorded and validated. For me, the interviews were a chance to converse with industry colleagues, also a learning experience and most of all, a pleasure. Even though the interviews covered some very serious and personal material, we laughed a lot.

Before I introduce each of the women, I begin with some things they have, and do not have, in common. Out of the ten women who participated in the interviews, all but two, Alana and Jill, are university educated (Rosie is in college), and only two, Lisa and Rosie, identified as heterosexual. Lisa was the only woman in the study with a child. Half of the women were in a

relationship at the time of the interview. Two participants, Vivian and Jill, suffer from chronic illness.³⁶ Finally, Sara, Bertha and Anik are homeowners.

In their time in the sex industry, several of the women had worked in various parts of Canada, some had worked in the United States, and one participant had worked in England. They had left the sex industry between one and three times, and for some, their first transition was still in process. All had worked as full time sex workers³⁷ for a significant portion of their time in the industry. Their involvement in the sex industry, which included breaks, time spent in other jobs, and part time sex work, had taken place over a span of 3 to 23 years. Their ages ranged from 28 to 52.

Now 33 years old, **Alana** has left the sex industry three times, the latest due to an injury. A ‘foul-mouthed’ and hilarious storyteller, Alana is relentlessly public about her sex work:

I kind of feel it's my duty as a sex worker you know, to let people know. Just because you have this misconception...and you assume that we're all either you know, 20 dollar crack-whores or you know 500 dollar an hour, jet-setting call girls...that's not the case. (para. 96)

Whether it's with the “churchies” she volunteers with at the food bank, in job interviews, or through her current job at a sex workers’ organization, Alana is always educating about and advocating for sex workers, and indeed, how people reacted to being educated was what made many of her stories so funny, touching and sometimes, heartbreaking. The definitive jack-of-all-trades, Alana has held a wide variety of jobs, both in the sex industry and in the mainstream labour market, sometimes simultaneously. She has worked as escort, independently, on the

³⁶ Although I will not disclose the details of their conditions to safeguard their anonymity, it should be noted that Vivian and Jill’s illnesses were not sexually transmitted. As I will discuss in the next two chapters, these illnesses sometimes influenced their employment decisions.

³⁷ Because sex work does not take place in ‘regular’ (9-5, 5 days per week) hours or schedule, ‘full time’ sex work should be understood as a principal source of income and main work activity.

street and indoors, for an agency, as a dominatrix, an adult model, as well as answering the phones for an escort agency. Alana's numerous 'straight'³⁸ jobs include:

...operations manager of a non-profit, receptionist, administrative assistant, executive assistant, um, I worked for a freight-forwarder doing dispatch, doing um bartending, cocktail waitressing, regular waitressing, um, bussing, coat-check a few times, worked at a couple after-hours...postering, drywalling, um, cook, personal cook-clean-house whatever, nanny, babysitting, gardening, landscaping, bike courier...musician...Harm reduction worker, you know, outreach worker... (para. 180)

Alana was involved in sex work on-and-off for over ten years. She is an American citizen who is still in the process of immigrating to Canada. Currently in a long-term polyamorous relationship with a woman, Alana identifies as queer. She thinks sex work is “*one of the most important things in the world*” (para. 156).

Espousing a similar view to Alana about sex work, **Anik** “*felt like the Mother Teresa of sex*” (para. 23). Anik has never done any other sex industry job besides escorting – “*I have loved being an escort*” (para. 7) – over the past 16 years, during which time she enjoyed the intimate spaces she created with people and the private thoughts they shared with her. Anik has worked as an escort for an agency and independently, and also ran and worked in a small escort agency, where she tried to give her “*working friends the best conditions that are out there in the industry*” (para. 107). At 36 years old, Anik is almost at the end of her first transition. Although she is in a monogamous relationship with a man, Anik identifies as bisexual. She has a graduate degree and aspires to set up a private practice as a psychologist. Aside from her current job at a sex worker organization, where she has worked for a few years, Anik has held few mainstream positions because she was too busy with her sex work and her schooling.

Like Alana and Anik, **Jill** is deeply passionate about sex worker rights. Because of her activism, her criminal record (for sex work related charges) and the length of time she spent as a

³⁸ Sex workers refer to mainstream jobs as 'straight' jobs and, similarly, to the world outside the sex industry as the 'straight' world.

sex worker, Jill is the only participant besides Alana who courageously and consistently puts sex work on her resume. Greeting me in her sundress with a smile and a girlish voice when we met for the interview, Jill might just be the last person one would suspect to have “*worked probably about 18 years full time in different areas of the sex trade*” (Jill, para. 7). At 40 years old, she is currently in the midst of her first transition out of the industry. She began working full time in the field of social work four years ago. Having long yearned for benefits and labour rights as a sex worker, Jill now champions the labour rights of her employees in her capacity as a manager of a women’s health clinic. Although relationships are not really her thing, Jill is in a polyamorous relationship with a woman and identifies as a lesbian. Jill loves her pets – or as she calls them, her “*furry kids*” (para. 59) – of whom she has had many over the years.

Although I did not meet any of Jill’s pets, **Rosie**’s new kitten kept us company throughout her interview. Rosie is 31 years old and has worked on and off in the sex industry over the past three years, in massage parlours and for incall and outcall escort agencies. When she first started escorting, she had an office job “*...and then at lunchtime, I’d take a cab over to the incall, I’d do a call, and then I’d come back to work*” (para. 15). Sex work allowed Rosie to move around and live in different cities, and go to school. Rosie was insistent that sex work is hard work: “*...a lot of people [think] you just spread your legs and whatever. No, it’s not like that. It takes a lot of social skills... as well be able to have your wits about you and not be taken advantage of, you know?*” (para. 39). Having finished her college courses, Rosie is waiting for her license to start her own business as a registered massage therapist, a passion she discovered through sex work:

I feel really good...when I talk to people and help them with their problems and stuff like that, so that’s kind of like what I feel I’m on this earth to do. And it took me a weird way to get here, because if I had never become a prostitute, I never would have worked in a massage parlour, and then I never would have found out that what I really want to do is massage people. (Rosie, para. 222)

While Rosie is very caring, she is also quite political and questioned the notion of what it means to be “*a contributing member of society*” (para. 19).

Also a student, **Vivian** is more spiritedly political than Rosie. Vivian identifies as queer, both sexually and politically, and has found great support in the radical queer community, where

[stigma is] not something I've really experienced. Like honestly, within my friend group, coming out as let's say, monogamous and wanting to get married, has way more stigma than coming out as like, a stripper. Like, one of my friends got married, and like, oh my god, there was major discussion. (para. 95)

After starting sex work as an adult webcam model, Vivian worked in massage parlours with various levels of sexual contact. Now 28 years old and in graduate school, Vivian left the industry three times over a span of four years – the last time was about a year and a half ago. Even though her last departure was precipitated by a bad experience, Vivian feels “*really positively*” (para. 135) about sex work now, and is considering going back this year, though perhaps in a different sector. Outside the sex industry, Vivian has worked as a community organizer and a childcare worker. Although she had a shaved head when she first started in the sex industry, Vivian now enjoys being a “*high femme*” who “*can dance in high heels*” (para. 71).

Like Vivian, **Sara** is also petite and feminine. But Sara was a surprise: an attractive, soft-spoken, friendly (she made me dinner!), 52-year old with four cats, she had “*really flourished as a dominatrix*” (para. 19). Beginning as an escort in her late 30s, Sara worked both independently and for agencies, over two years, and then spent eight years as a professional dominatrix and submissive. Sara recounted her escapades in the sex industry with relish. Among her highlights were superhero fetish scenes with clients, as well as the opportunity:

...to be one of the people that brought sex radicalism into a positive place in community. Xaviera Hollander squeezed my bum when I danced with her, said I had a fantastic ass. That was a highlight at a sex worker conference in LA. I got to be in a whirlpool with Midori, naked. That was a high point. (Sara, para. 149)

The S/M community and the lesbian feminist community have both been important parts of Sara's life. She is in a relationship with a woman and identifies as a bi-curious, femme lesbian. Trained as an archivist, Sara now works at an art gallery. Because Sara started in the sex industry so late, she had previously held a variety of mainstream jobs in the art sector, which she kept up on a part time or occasional basis during her time as a sex worker.

The same cannot be said of **Bertha**, who never had a mainstream job before she recently started working part-time at a community organization. Incredibly analytic and articulate (if sometimes overwhelmingly so), Bertha is a consummate businesswoman with a passion for education. She is 31 years old and is still in the process of transitioning out of the industry after approximately ten years. After starting in erotic massage, a "*light, gentle introduction to sex work*" (Bertha, para. 243), Bertha worked with incall and outcall agencies, then independently as an escort. She is in a relationship with a woman and usually prefers women, but identifies as bisexual. Bertha is nearing the end of a graduate degree in criminology and sees a few 'regulars'³⁹ occasionally to fund her school. However, she has gained a bit of weight since she quit escorting full time. Of course, Bertha "*can still work it,*" but as she explained: "*I still fit into my shoes – that's it! [laughs] I could go [see a client] with a pair of heels and a jacket. And to tell you the truth, most of the times I've worked in the past couple years, that's basically all I wore [laughs]*" (para. 51).

Also in graduate school, **Julie** has a variety of part-time jobs in the academy, of which she says: "*these jobs are jobs I also hope to transition out of, so [laughs] into something hopefully better*" (para. 175). At the time of her previous transition, Julie had a few minimum wage service industry jobs before she went back to school. Because of this, she is very critical of the

³⁹ 'Regular' is short form for regular customer. This is not a term specific to the sex industry: bartenders and waitresses talk about their regulars as well.

mainstream labour market and its dearth of good jobs: *“It’s not like I see the move into straight work as being this like, you know, fabulous thing, like it’s also got it’s shitty things...”* (Julie, para. 171). Now 31 years old, Julie is transitioning out of sex work for her second time, while going to school over the last five years. Julie spent two years as an erotic dancer, a total of six years as an escort, for an agency and independently, and has also worked in erotic massage. In her personal sex life, *“I don’t describe myself as straight...but I generally date men, although I’ve seen some women, but typically men”* (Julie, para. 259).

Like Julie, **Leila** is classically beautiful, except where Julie is gentle, graceful and calm, Leila is bubbly and vivacious. Now 28 years old, Leila still sees regulars occasionally. Her involvement in sex work has spanned approximately ten years, wherein she has left the sex industry twice. After spending a year as a dancer, Leila tried escorting:

I applied in [a newspaper], cheap agency, didn’t know there was all this world online, and so one night, one night in a van with girls I don’t relate to, and just like, annoying sounds in my ears, and the driver was just farting and we’d stayed the entire night in the van and I didn’t have a call, so no thanks. One night. And then another night with another incall agency from downtown. Whoa, um I spent most of the night looking at the guy who had the agency, and he had a website as well, he was in the newspaper but he had a website. I was like, yeah ok, that’s how you do it... (para. 255)

After that short, steep learning curve, Leila started working as an independent escort, and later applied her talent for business to running a small escort agency. A committed advocate for sex worker rights, Leila now works full time at a sex worker organization, where *“the mission is tattooed on my heart”* (para. 191). Leila identifies as a lesbian, a workaholic and a lover of good food and good wine.

Lisa’s heart is also close to sex worker rights: she always feels compelled to respond to anti-sex worker comments, *“just like if I heard a racist comment, or a homophobic comment”* (para. 91). At 44 years old, Lisa has left the industry three times over a span of 21 years, during which

time she went back to school and became a social worker. In the social work and community health realm, her jobs have included harm-reduction, support and outreach work. When she worked as a residential counselor in a halfway house for previously incarcerated women, Lisa did not disclose her work in the sex industry out of concern for her credibility. However, she *“never forgot for one minute that the only difference between me and the women that I was working with was that I never got caught, for any of my shenanigans”* (para. 55). Although she has not seen a client in several months, Lisa describes her involvement in the sex industry as *“in half and half”* (para. 7). Otherwise, Lisa has worked in bars in various capacities. In the sex industry, she always preferred working as an escort, but has also worked in erotic massage, as a receptionist, a manager, and has also rented rooms in her apartment to sex workers. Very straight forward in her attitude towards (and aptitudes in) sex work, Lisa insisted:

...I'm the type of sex worker, well, prostitution has been my area of sex work, that I'm the type that this whole 20 dollars to take my top off, 20 dollars to do this. This whole hustle is not my forte, it's not where my skill set lies. If a man calls and they know what they're calling about, they know why they're calling, I know why they're calling, we negotiate a price, it's all out on the table, everything's there. It's very transparent, right? (para. 19)

Lisa is honest, warm, and easy going, and a bit of a hippie. At the moment, she does contract work for a sex worker organization.

From their stories, we see that the women who participated in this project have a variety of life and work experiences, from *“working on the street ...[having] to wonder, god, is this guy going to try and rape me or rob me or kill me?”* (Alana, para. 172) to *“getting paid thousands of dollars to spend the night”* (Bertha, para. 223). I have presented these brief biographies in order to emphasize and celebrate each woman's individuality before it is lost in the horizontal reading of data necessitated by qualitative research methods. Having done that, I can now move on to a cross-sectional examination of their trajectories, challenges and strategies in the transition.

CHAPTER 5: TRAJECTORY, CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

As sex worker activist Margot St. James famously declared: “A blow job is better than no job” (quoted in Ringdal 2004, 377) and as we have seen in the women’s biographies, sex work can be a sensible and strategic counter-balance to the unreliable territory of the neo-liberal labour market (see Westcott et al. 2006). As such, this chapter will feature the practical aspects of participants’ transitions, and the trends, characteristics and concepts arising from their stories. Participants’ journeys will be presented beginning with their decisions to leave the industry, followed by their processes of transitioning, including challenges and strategies, and finally, where they are now. Throughout the chapter, I will put my findings in conversation with the existing literature.

Transitioning out of sex work is a complex journey. However, as I will explain, it is neither a strictly linear nor a particularly disorganized process, and in this respect my findings diverged from Ebaugh’s (1988) role exit theory⁴⁰ as well as Sanders’ (2007) typologies. Because many of the participants quit sex work and came back several times, the trajectories, challenges, strategies and outcomes of their transitions are complex and highly subjective.

The decision

While some participants only left once, others moved in and out of sex work, sometimes alongside another kind of job. Participants’ reasons for leaving can be described as physical, emotional and situational. Some participants transitioned for a combination of reasons, whereas some only had one reason.

⁴⁰ An acknowledgement of the constrained nature of choice in the neo-liberal labour market complicates Ebaugh’s variables of ‘voluntariness’ and ‘degree of control’ in the transition. Indeed, Westcott et al. (2006) would likely disagree with Ebaugh’s qualification of occupational changes as having a high degree of control. As such, I will not be using this particular aspect of Ebaugh’s role exit theory in my discussion of participants’ trajectories.

Physical reasons

Physical reasons for leaving, working less or staying out of the industry included injury, weight gain and illness. Alana's most recent transition "*came about by accident...literally by accident...I sprained my ankle and I really couldn't work with a sprained ankle*" (para. 11). This led to another physical reason that prevented her from returning to sex work:

...then after a couple months...like I was involved with a roller derby league and that really kept me in shape and everything, and of course, I couldn't skate... so then suddenly I'm not doing anything and weight started going and my muscles started kinda leaving me and I got very insecure actually about going back, right, because I realized I had a completely different body than I had had just a few months prior, and I didn't want to go find new clients, you know and at that point, some of my old clients were gone. I had lost a phone, I had moved, you know. So, the thought of starting, pretty much starting over, and in a completely different body that I wasn't that proud of...was a maybe not, right. So that actually had a lot to do with it (para. 19)

Here we see an emotional component to a physical reason: Alana stayed out of sex work because she came to feel insecure about the weight she had gained.

Emotional reasons

Emotional reasons included 'burnout' (similar to McNaughton and Sanders 2007; Rickard 2001; Sanders 2007), love (also found by Manobaipoon et al. 2003; Mansson and Hedin 1999; Sanders 2007) and depression. These were sometimes active choices that participants made, as with deciding to leave or work less because they were 'in love,' whereas with burnout and depression, participants quit or cut down their sex work as a reactive measure of self-care.

Several participants talked about being 'burnt out' at different points in their time in the sex industry, as a contributing factor in their decisions to quit, work less or change sectors in the industry. There was a reticence in the way they talked about 'burnout,' visible in Julie's story:

...I'm kind of looking forward to that moment when [sex work] ...isn't as necessary to my economic sustenance as it is right now, so. I feel guilty kind of saying that because I'm always so like--I really think we should have positive attitude about sex work and I feel kind of like I'm not, you know, towing the [line]--I want to have a good attitude about it, but I just

feel tired about it. And I guess how you feel about work is always changing, like any job, you feel--yeah, I would say I'm ready to hang up the g-string... (para. 31)

In Julie's reluctance about no longer having a good attitude towards sex work, we see a pre-emptive response to assumptions of victimization in the sex industry.⁴¹

Rather than being caused by trauma, 'burnout' in sex work can be caused by what Lisa described as the human interaction element of sex work, or what Hochschild (2003) termed "emotional labour," referring to customer-service oriented jobs that involve an emotional interaction, including the performance and manipulation of emotions.⁴² The pitfalls of emotional labour are apparent in Julie's relationships with her regular⁴³ clients:

... I feel like I'm dating like, how many men, but I feel like I have relationships with them so that's actually been very taxing for me...it's not so much the work, it's my relationship to it, and how I feel about what I want to give to other people right now...and the clients...they're not bad people, they're just people and they want attention, but right now...they all feel like the most annoying people alive...not all of them, but... (para. 23)

However, the strain of emotional labour was not the only cause of 'burnout.' For Rosie: "*I feel that I need [openness], like I could never live a life of secrecy, and um, it takes a toll on you like psychologically...*" (para. 79). As Julie said, "*it's not so much the work*" (para. 23) – indeed participants insisted that burnout was not particular to sex work⁴⁴ and that it could be managed – but rather that burnout in sex work is compounded by stigma and its consequences, notably

⁴¹ Outside of this study, I have heard many sex workers complain that if they say they had a bad day or are feeling sick of work, outsiders are likely to equate this with sex work being inherently exploitative, when anyone can have a bad day at any job (see also Sprinkle 1997). Lisa, Leila and Anik all echoed this sentiment in their comments about burnout in sex work and other jobs.

⁴² There are a number of studies on burnout in the service industry and other sectors described as emotional labour (see for example de Jong et al. 2008; Kim 2008; Pienaar and Willemsse 2008).

⁴³ Relationships with regular clients, or 'regulars,' while different for every sex worker, often start because of frequency and quality (i.e. frequent and lucrative customers), but with time, can shift between business and personal, or performed and real emotional relationships. The nebulous nature of these relationships was a recurring theme across the interviews.

⁴⁴ The commonalities and difficulties of burnout are well captured in the following quote from a doctor in Ebaugh's role exit study: "...I think the thing that got me after a while was that I saw no way out. It was the same thing over and over every day with no variations, no options, no choices, and I kind of wanted to break out of that and sort of take control of my own life. But I couldn't see a way out at the time" (Ebaugh 1988, 54).

criminalization and isolation.⁴⁵ This is most pronounced in Julie's first transition, which was precipitated by "*terrible shame*" (para. 23). In other words, Julie had become 'burnt out' by the stigma she had started to internalize.

Of course, not all emotional reasons were negative. Leila was happy to quit escorting when she got married: "*pour moi c'était tellement un relief de finalement trouver une personne qui acceptait mon travail, que j'ai décider d'arrêter*" (para. 23). After Leila left her husband, she went back to working in the sex industry, although she regrets having lost touch with her best regular client in the interim.

Situational reasons

Situational reasons included pursuing a goal, such as a new career path or school, for which participants reduced or stopped sex work to prioritize. Leila had left sex work once to go to school, and Bertha and Rosie had cut down their sex work for this reason. McIntyre (2002) also found pursuing a new career or educational path among her participants' reasons for transitioning. As Julie said: "*I don't think I made a firm decision [to transition]. I think it's just maybe understood as the end goal, that this is kind of something that is going to get me to my goal, which is to finish school and get a job in my field*" (para. 27).

Other situational reasons included having a baby, moving cities, or poor labour conditions and other unpleasant experiences. The first time Lisa left, it was to have a child. This echoed the findings of Mansson and Hedin (1999 and 2003), as well as McIntyre (2002), and McNaughton and Sanders (2007). Jill described her decision as "*based upon income security, particularly in regards to benefits...I was experiencing some chronic and sometimes debilitating*

⁴⁵ De Jong et al. (2008) cited "job resources" as moderating the toll of emotional labour, which confirms my suggestion that sex workers' experience of burnout could be exacerbated by the high incidence of stigma, isolation and self-employment, and consequently, the scarcity of resources such as emotional support provided by employers and/or colleagues, in the sex industry.

health issues, and so not to have say, paid sick leave was perturbing and worrying for me” (Jill, para. 7).

Only one participant in the study, Vivian, was comparable to the findings of Hotaling et al. (2004), Mansson and Hedin (1999), McIntyre (2002), and McNaughton and Sanders (2007) in that she left sex work because of a violent situation. She described this experience as follows:

I was working in a massage parlour, like on and off for a few years, and...[in] that type of work...a lot of the girls just do massages but a lot of the girls do like, other stuff as well... So I was doing, like, blowjobs. And then I had a client that um, that you know, it was fine, and I did that. And then...I took like a six-month break from working in the industry and then when I got back into it, I decided that the only way I could sort of like, do it again and like, last more long term was to like, not do blow jobs and actually like, follow the rules. So then I went back. And then...the previous man, came with like, certain expectations and then when he realized, you know, that like, it wasn't gonna happen, he got very angry...it was really scary... He didn't attack me but he like, you know. I yelled, and you know, told him to fuck off and...whatever to get him out of there, and then the other woman that was working like, reprimanded me, for like, yelling, because I disturbed her and her client. And then I'm like, seriously? It was really fucked up. And then, you know, I went home, and then I was scheduled to like, go back the next day, so I'm like ok, I'll go back the next day, and I was just there and like, I just was so fearful, like I couldn't really like, do it. So then I left, and stopped... (Vivian, para. 7)

While Vivian was not attacked by her client, this situation was destabilizing and clearly violated her boundaries and sense of control over her work, causing her to leave the sex industry.

An additional situational reason to leave sex work occurred at times when participants had saved up enough money to leave, although this was generally understood as a ‘break,’ or ‘taking a few months off.’ This was true for Rosie and Vivian (previous to her bad experience).

Multiple reasons

Several participants left for a combination of reasons. For example, Lisa's second time leaving the sex industry was for physical, emotional and situational reasons:

...the circumstances were that when I moved...I got ill when I first came here with depression ...I then proceeded to put on an enormous amount of weight and I didn't think there was a market for plus sized women at that time... Also, my experience in the [massage] parlours... in [new city], was not a good experience...[because] it's not where my skill set lies...it was

also around the same time that I...had thought about going back to school... so I decided to go to college. I decided ok I'm just going to take a break from sex work for a while, focus on school. (para. 19)

Lisa was also careful to point out that: *“it was more that I didn't think that I could make money, than wanting a different way of life”* (para. 95).

Conversely, some participants did want a different way of life. For Sara, *“When I realized that I couldn't get enough of the sex work if I had a dinner date, or if I had a date to go to the movies, or if I had any kind of obligation... The sex work became an interruption, and it started becoming very irritating...”* (para. 19). Although ‘burnout’ was a contributing factor, Sara described her transition more as a systematic shifting of goals, from establishing financial stability to finding a partner:

When I had achieved that – I had some savings, I had the house – it was time to look at finding a partner... [My partner was] pro-sex worker, but when it really came down to the wire, they were very concerned that their family would find out because they are from a very large family, and it is possible they could have found out. I had to tone it down, and ultimately decided that I should get another kind of job. One day I lost my black book. My wallet was stolen. Suddenly it was an opportunity to quit [laughs] cold. As much as I remembered some of the phone numbers, whoever I could remember, I phoned them and said ok, I'm toning it down and getting out of the business. (para. 7)

Similarly, Anik had closed her agency because she was becoming increasingly irritated with the interruptions that running such a business caused in her daily life. Anik described her decision to leave as: *“not having my heart at work because I'm in love, and I want to stay home and cuddle with my man, not cuddle so many strange men”* (para. 35) combined with the fact that *“it wasn't a real career for me, and now I should move on to my real career”* (para. 35). At the same time however, Anik worries about how she will negotiate severing her relationships with her regular clients.

Among the various combinations of reasons for leaving, age was not found to be particularly significant in this study. In contrast to Brewis and Linstead (2000), Rickard (2001), and

Escoffier (2007), none of the participants stopped sex work because they were too old – indeed, Sara did not start escorting until she was 35, and still continues to work occasionally at age 52.

Bertha mentioned age not in relation to how much she could continue charging, or because she worried that clients would no longer find her attractive after a certain age, but rather because she felt like she should have accomplished certain things in her life by a certain age (para. 19):

I stopped because I got an opportunity to do something else that I didn't think would come my way again...that's why I stopped at that moment, that particular year, but in general, I saw myself transitioning at some point within that five year period, because I didn't want to be making these decisions when I'm 40. I wanted to be making them when I was 30.

Here, Bertha alludes to what she and many other participants expressed about their involvement in the sex industry – that it was envisioned as a temporary job and not a lifelong career. While Bertha was adamant that she had never felt ashamed of sex work, her comment above suggests a conflict between participants' pride in their sex work and their adherence to normative scripts. Participants' struggles with notions of career and success will be taken up in the next chapter.

The Process

Perhaps in part because of participants' conflicted feelings about the transition, it was not an easy process. This section examines participants' trajectories, including their support networks, how they used the skills they had acquired in sex work, what they put on their curriculum vitae, and the stigma they encountered in their searches for mainstream jobs. As we will see, transitioning is a process conditioned by stigma.

Trajectory

As with their reasons for leaving, participants' trajectories in their transitions were very personal, and involved many factors, decisions and outcomes. Participants who had left the sex industry several times did not always come back to the same job or in the same capacity. After Alana quit due to 'burnout' from working for an agency, she "*started missing it, and then I went*

into it differently” (para. 15) by only returning to sex work part time. Jill described her strategy to mitigate ‘burnout’: “*in my many years of working I have had times where I’ve felt burnt out or fed up or frustrated or irritated. My strategy that worked for me was to change sectors within the sex trade...*” (para. 11). Both of these solutions are comparable to the career-prolonging strategies of diversification discussed by Escoffier (2007).⁴⁶

Using these kinds of strategies, participants left the sex industry between one and three times. It should however be noted that the difference between quitting and taking a break from sex work were variously self-defined. Whereas Alana mentioned that she wanted to go back because she missed sex work, it was the money that compelled Leila, Julie, Rosie and Vivian (after breaks) to return. McIntyre (2002) and Manopaiboon et al. (2003) also found this to be a major incentive.

Many of the participants cut down their sex work and kept only their best⁴⁷ regular customers. This was true for Bertha, Leila, Anik, Jill, Sara and Julie, who were all independent escorts for a significant part of their time in the sex industry. Anik, Julie and Jill, have longstanding relationships with their regular clients (five to twenty years) that have developed some degree of emotional significance: for Anik and Jill, it was their appreciation for the personal closeness of these relationships that prolonged their transitions. Jill explained:

I actually did make an effort for my regulars with whom I had more of an emotional attachment or a longer lasting relationship, I actually made an effort to remain connected to them, because in addition to being concerned about not having sort of a fall back if the straight world didn’t work out for me, they were also relationships that I didn’t want to relinquish or lose. As I say, they were longstanding relationships. They knew a lot about me. I knew a lot about them. It would have been a gross absence in my life if you know, this

⁴⁶ However, Escoffier’s “retrogressive dynamic” was not consistent with my findings. In particular, Bertha and Anik talked about how they earned more (not less, as the retrogressive dynamic dictates) with clients after having worked as escorts for a few years and establishing themselves in the business. This may indicate that the retrogressive dynamic is particular to pornography and does not apply to the provision of individual sexual services.

⁴⁷ Again, because relationships with regulars can vary immensely, ‘best’ can be understood to describe most lucrative, most frequent, closest connection, etc. or any combination of these qualities.

group of people with whom I had--albeit within professional parameters--with whom I had intimate relationships, for them suddenly to be gone. I mean that would be like losing a whole whack of friends at once. (para. 39)

Anik is in a similar situation with her two regulars that she keeps in addition to working four days per week at the office. However, Jill differs from Anik in that although she has a full-time mainstream job and has developed her career in the sexual health field over the last few years, she does not want to abandon sex work completely. She explained this as follows: *“I think the reason I haven’t left entirely is because I would feel--I wouldn’t leave. I think I would feel a loss in terms of connections, community, um, sort of sense of self, connections with clients...”* (Jill, para. 43). Rather than being on a linear trajectory with sex work at the start of the transition and mainstream work at the end, Jill can be seen to be on two parallel work trajectories, with her mainstream job taking more of her time and her sex work continuing on a part time basis. Sara also continues to have a parallel work trajectory: she kept part time or occasional mainstream jobs while she was working full time as a sex worker, and now that she works full time in her mainstream job, she still sees clients occasionally.

In short, for Jill, as well as for Bertha, Leila, Anik, Sara and Julie, the transition is a gradual process characterized by overlap between sex work and mainstream work, as they seek to accommodate shifting goals and adjust to changing needs over time. Although the participants may appear to be “yo-yoing” (as in Sanders 2007), their paths have been shaped by strategy rather than disorganization, even though there are no fixed or linear stages in the transition. Because participants made progress in mainstream goals, such as school or career paths, while maintaining their work in the sex industry either continuously or sporadically, their transitions can be seen as complex journeys that involve multiple, parallel trajectories in the sex industry and the mainstream labour market.

Participants who quit suddenly, such as Alana and Vivian, still consider sex work as an option, which complicates the idea of making a ‘clean break.’ Additionally, because they had to get (one or more) jobs as soon as possible to replace their incomes and have time to transition into better jobs, their transitions can also be seen to encompass multiple, parallel work trajectories. At the same time, the relatively abrupt and unplanned start of their transitions caused Alana and Vivian to be especially reliant on their support networks.

Support networks

Consistent with the findings of Hedin and Mansson (2003), participants found their networks helpful.⁴⁸ At different points in their transitions, they were supported by their friends, partners, colleagues, and to a lesser extent, their families. Some participants got emotional support from their networks, some got financial support (which sometimes included housing), and some got both. Several participants also noted that they were capable of managing the transition independently.

Jill, Vivian, Lisa and Bertha had close networks of friends that supported them in any decision they made in their lives. Julie and Bertha appreciated support from the sex worker community, as did Anik and Leila, through their jobs at sex worker organizations. Several participants kept in touch with the sex worker community, which did not impede their transitions. Instead, and in contrast to Hedin and Mansson (2003), and McIntyre (2002),⁴⁹ keeping in touch made them feel less isolated.

Some participants needed and found financial support in their transitions. Rosie’s father provided some financial help, and Julie moved back in with her mother and received financial

⁴⁸ However, what support networks were helpful *with* differed. Whereas Hedin and Mansson found them useful in the trauma-recovery process, my participants found their networks useful in more practical and general ways, for instance, financial support.

⁴⁹ This is likely due to differences in demographics; those two studies focussed on ‘survival’ sex workers who cut their ties with the sex industry to resolve issues such as addictions or trauma.

support from her boyfriend at the time of her first transition out of the sex industry. Alana's partner supported her financially as well, although this caused tension in the relationship:

...she basically said you know look, if you want to take a break... don't worry about the rent for a bit... and so she kind of supported me, and you know that was great for a bit, but it actually had a lot to do with, you know, the eventual kind of friction... I was very used to being independent and always being able to pay the bills and whatever, and in fact, paying for her for a while, right and you know to then be in this situation, even though she invited it, said yeah, here do this, just take a break, it's fine. She supported me but I didn't like it, so it was that way for a while, but then there were problems, so I supported myself. (para. 60)

Alana was not alone in finding financial support from such close quarters stressful. Even though her boyfriend now pays most of their mortgage, Anik has not yet been able to bring herself to stop seeing her two long-time regulars, despite this arrangement with her boyfriend: “so I'm having a hard time justifying that I'm still doing it for the money. I have enough [money] to not do it anymore...with my boyfriend, it's in the last year, two years, it's become more, creating more tensions and more conflicts when I go to work” (para. 7).

Vivian's transition was abrupt, but her friends rallied to support her emotionally and financially: “...I had friends that offered to give me like, you know, fifty bucks, a hundred bucks, like, and people that don't have a lot of money. Like just to get by and I would pay them back. Like, that's amazing” (para. 35).

The only participant to be completely ‘out’⁵⁰ to and still close with her family, Leila was also alone in being supported emotionally by her family:

...mon avantage c'est quand même que toute ma famille est au courant, toute ma famille m'accepte là-dedans, ils savent que je fait des décisions écoeurées, so I can talk about the transition to my father. He's really close to me...it makes it easier if you don't keep that to yourself. (para. 83)

Participants also found support from other sources. Bertha described herself as “lucky” to have mentors (indeed, she was the only participant to have such a resource⁵¹) who prepared her

⁵⁰ Some participants had partially disclosed to their families and some were firm that they would never tell their families about their sex work. The question of disclosure will be addressed in greater detail in the next chapter.

to some extent for her transition, whereas Rosie appreciated the emotional support from her psychologist. Along with Rosie, Lisa was able to get government funding for school.

While participants found their networks helpful, their decision to leave sex work was not always met with understanding. Even Leila's family's reaction to her transition surprised her: "*my family, they're like, oh my god, you must be relieved, you know? And I wasn't*" (para. 135). As someone who is also quite public about sex work, Jill was disappointed by one friend's reaction:

I had one friend who had always been quite supportive of my being in the sex trade, but I had always known she had some degree of discomfort with it, or...lack of understanding. I don't think it made her uncomfortable um in sort of the ew, ick way, but I think she was like...she knew I was okay with it, but she knew she wouldn't be okay with it, and she wasn't able to sort of bridge that, what for her was a gap. So when I did say to her I'd gotten this [mainstream] job, she was like, a little too excited, and that actually did impact our relationship, right. I was like okay...she isn't as cool with this as I thought. She's still got some issues and although that realization wasn't the cause our relationship eventually disintegrating, I do think that it had a significant impact. (para. 47)

Predicting this kind of reaction, Anik did not talk much about her transition with people she knew: "*I guess I just assume that my friends who are not in this business just think...oh my god, you don't have to put up with ugly people that sweat anymore and you miss that!*" (para. 67).

While it was disappointing to encounter such reactions in their social circles, participants were very aware of the popularity of such perceptions, which are another manifestation of stigma. Speaking to the prevalence of stigmatic opinions, Julie said: "*...I think the thing that's sort of the worst is just the forces that be or the powers that be make the right decision always leaving...*" (para. 83). These responses are consistent with Ebaugh's qualification of the transition out of sex work as a socially acceptable role change, or rather, a role change into social acceptability.

⁵¹ The lack of mentorship was especially evident in participants' challenges with money, which I present in a later section. Ricard's participants (2001) also noted a dearth of mentorship.

Skills

While the social acceptability of their skills may have been questionable, participants talked at length about the value of what they had learned in the sex industry. Translating these skills into something marketable in the mainstream was sometimes challenging, and at other times, impossible. This frustrated Julie:

...on my resume for instance, I can't say that I've done x-y-z thing, I have skills through doing this or running my business or any of that...I can't say, oh yeah, check my website, I can't do that, but I really--I was really happy with how everything went with the business, and it was really exciting to put, like, a little thing together and have a concept and you know, execute it and have work...that's what people do in a small business...so I think the skills have been very good...so that's frustrating to sort of have hidden skills... (para. 211)

Sometimes it was even difficult when the skills were not hidden. Jill, who disclosed her sex work on her CV for several job applications, described some of these challenges (para. 15):

I've been able to find these little sort of niche markets, but I know I wouldn't be employable in many, many fields...because I was in the sex trade for so long, uh, I think in many potential employers' you know, views, um it's almost like you're beyond redemption, right. Its not like you had one bad summer, [laughs] had to turn a few tricks, so you're sort of entrenched in some sort of 'lifestyle.' Um, but you've been out of the conventional labour market for a period of time, so often there's concerns about what your actual skills might be.

Participants insisted that they had learned and developed many skills in the sex industry, and listed the following as transferable: management skills such as: money management, human resources management, entrepreneurship; communication skills such as: how to communicate with, manage and retain clients, how to quickly make people feel comfortable and safe, how to read people's emotions, therapy, empathy, listening skills, networking skills, teamwork, care skills (i.e. dealing with people on drugs), conflict resolution; public relations skills such as: advertising, building and promoting a brand/image, maintaining a website, targeting and tailoring marketing to a particular audience; general work skills such as: working independently, stress management, booking and organizing a work schedule, self-motivation; and other skills such as:

adaptability, creative problem-solving, long-term planning, strategizing to work around criminalization, assertiveness, boundaries, self-confidence, intuition/reading body language/assessing people, and self care. Many of these skills were also enumerated by Rickard (2001), as well as Bruckert et al. (2003). Some were of course not transferable – in particular, “*Sexual skills!*” (Leila, para. 219) – however, no matter what kind of job they got outside of the sex industry, participants found the communication and interpersonal skills to be very useful. This was a pronounced contrast to Woodman (2000) and Rabinovitch (2004), who portrayed former sex workers as floundering in mainstream jobs. As Sara said, “*it’s the same skill set as any kind of business*” (para. 145).

In addition to being applicable to other jobs, the skills participants had learned in the sex industry were also useful in other areas of life. Vivian extolled the value of “*boundary creation*” in her personal life, which she described as:

...learning really what I’m comfortable with. Because at first I really wanted to please the clients ...so sometimes I got into situations where I wasn’t actually that comfortable, and that only after the fact, I was like, ugh, I wasn’t really comfortable with how that all went down ... I really learned a sense of like...physically how to advocate for myself in a way that is useful in like ‘normal’ life, and in your relations with other people, your intimate relationships, your regular girlfriends and boyfriends, like figuring out how to advocate for yourself and to always put my safety and my best interests in front of other people, like it’s really important. (para. 131)

She added that this skill was useful in her new professional life in academia as well:

And that’s really important in other situations... the main thing I think I learned was how to let people down in a way that makes them feel like winners, so like students-- in terms of marking students’ work, in terms of negotiating professional relationships with my advisor, like with my peers in a graduate program, like telling someone you think their ideas are crappy yet have them like you is a really important skill. (Vivian, para. 131)

Despite their usefulness however, like Rickard’s (2001) participants, most of the women did not feel comfortable listing these skills on their CV because they were worried about stigma.

Curriculum vitae (CV)

Consistent with Sanders' (2007) findings, the dearth of 'legitimate' work experience on their curriculum vitae was a significant concern for many participants. They identified multiple strategies in formulating resumes and searching for jobs, including euphemistic descriptions of their work, focusing on their education and volunteer experience, actually listing sex work when they felt they could, and applying for jobs in sectors (such as healthcare or social work) where such experience could be considered valid or even an asset.

For some participants, like Alana, there was no 'gap' because they included sex work on their curriculum vitae (para. 11):

I figured you know, here in Canada, prostitution is legal, so doesn't it look better--because I did work for an agency for a couple of years... I thought, what looks better, having a big 2, 3-year gap on my resume or saying here, I worked for this company and I did this.

At the same time however, she "had a little fun with it" (Alana, para. 88):

...I kind of really couched it in all the kinda like HR [human resources] speak... Some shit about engaging clients and you know, maximizing client satisfaction and all those kinda like HR buzzwords, I just sorta used them, because really, that is what we do. You know, like ensured repeat business, whatever, you know like, de-escalated issues, like all that kind of meaningless shit that people put on their resume. I put it all in there...It wasn't just to be snarky though, it was also to show people, look, this is a legitimate fucking job, and the same skills that I used at this office or whatever, I used in that...

Sex work also figured significantly in Jill's work trajectory, and with almost no other jobs, she did not want to exclude it:

...apart from some, sort of, very part time work I'd done, say, through sex worker organizations, I had nothing else on my resume, including very little formal education...So, my resume um, you know, clearly suggests that I've been a sex worker. Um the first straight job that I applied for at [a sexual health clinic], they already knew me as a sex worker because I had done some trainings with them, and indeed, on my resume, I put sex worker as one of my key jobs. But even if I hadn't done that, I think it would have been clear [laughs] ...from my different activities...that I was a sex worker, like research papers, or conferences or workshops I had presented on, etcetera. Um, so I did feel and continue to feel that um, having been a sex worker, particularly for an extended period of time, um, limits my options in terms of employment, and in fact, you know the places where I've found work outside of

the sex trade have all been, not just agencies or organizations or businesses that are around issues of sex and sexuality, primarily sort of sexual, reproductive health, but not only that, they've been organizations that have been quite non-conventional in their principles, their philosophies, and also the way they operate. (para. 15)

Initially unaware of how alternative an organization it was, Jill did not put sex work on her CV when she applied for her current job. However, she maintained that “*I think if I were to look for a new job, um even though I now have some complete non-sex work stuff on my resume, it only dates four years, right, so I think [sex work] would still come up*” (Jill, para. 91).

Most participants did not list sex work as consistently as Jill and Alana. For example, Leila and Anik only included sex work on their CV for their jobs at sex worker organizations. While Leila was grateful for this opportunity: “*I'm the luckiest sex worker out there who quit working, cause I actually could put in my resume, I needed to put in my resume, my experience of sex work*” (para. 143), she would not be so forthcoming in applying for future jobs: “[*at*] *worst worst, I'm just gonna include all my student parcours. But it's kind of like ok, you've been studying that much and yet you didn't have to work? ...I'm gonna tell them that I come from a rich family*” (Leila, para. 151).

Other participants managed to avoid ‘gaps’ by translating the skills they had acquired in sex work by altering their jobs entries, or alternately, by focusing on other experience. After having been in graduate school for some years, Julie felt that ‘gaps’ were no longer an issue: “*now I can be a really good faker because I have enough things...to make up for the [gaps]--now I don't have absences on my resume any longer...*” (para. 139). Also long enough to leave sex work out,

Bertha's CV included:

Everything that I did, with a tweak...I was always a very like active social justice activist, and I've always informally been part of collectives...I've gone to conferences...I've always volunteered my whole life, for different organizations, so I had a lot I could put, but then I put with a tweak, so for example, an informal education session that I did in my basement would turn into more of a public education, you know, session...If it weren't for my passion

in terms of education, that I guess was my hobby, I wouldn't have had a resume... I'm on my third degree right now...the two first degrees were hobbies. (para. 140)

Like Bertha, Lisa “*didn't differentiate between volunteer work and paid work. And just, you know, fluffed it up a little bit*” (para. 79).

Not all the participants needed to ‘tweak’ their CVs. Although she considered ‘gaps’ a “*huge issue*” (para. 15) Vivian said:

I don't put anything [on my CV]. What I told people, which luckily is true, is that I was chronically ill, and what I tell them now is that I'm well, even though I'm not really well. Um, so that's what I've told them... I would say, actually like, I have been chronically ill in the past... And they never ask any other questions about it, and legally they can't--because I present as someone who is healthy, they would never suspect that I still have problems, so, I don't think anyone's ever hired me because I had a history of illness.

In the times that Vivian had been too ill to work a full time job, she had worked in the sex industry because of its flexible scheduling and because she never qualified for disability benefits.

CVs were not stressful for everyone. Having started relatively late in the sex industry, at 27 and 35 respectively, both Rosie and Sara had held other kinds of mainstream jobs previously, as well as simultaneously and interspersed with sex work. Sara said: “*I had a lot of credentials already, so it wasn't a problem*” (para. 75). After being in school and escorting for a while, Rosie considered tweaking her CV in the future: “*I'll make up stuff that is reasonably believable, that I'm capable of doing, cause you know, I think that...as an escort it's like, I have a lot of skills, like you know, I've learnt a lot of stuff*” (para. 153). Here, Rosie's desire to “*make stuff up*” may be more related to wanting to validate her skills and experiences in the sex industry than because she needs the lines on her CV.

Stigma in job hunting

As discussed in the previous two sections, many of the women omitted sex work from their CVs to avoid stigma. However, Alana and Jill usually included sex work. While this sometimes

resulted in them not being hired, these two women were not discouraged from bravely continuing to argue for the validity of sex work as job experience. For Alana, this was a kind of ‘test’ for her potential employers, particularly those in the harm reduction and non-profit sectors: “...in theory, they’re pro-sex work or whatever, so it’s like fine, put your money where your fucking mouth is, right?” (para. 92).

Alana described several reactions of potential employers in an interview situation. The first was shock or surprise:

...it was really odd the responses or the non-responses I would get, like when I would...go to other non-profits or even harm reduction based kind of places, because those are the places that are most likely to hire someone in my situation...you could see them going through the employment history and...looking back and forth kind of thing. (para. 11)

The second was morbid curiosity:

...instead of that stand-offish kind of ugh thing, there’s the people that have that kind of prurient interest and they just really: Wow, what was it really like? And they almost want to live vicariously through you or something. Or...they want to hear your little horror stories...So, god, were they bad? Did they beat you? Did you have a pimp? Like, you know, no! I didn’t have a fuckin’ pimp...having to deal with that. It’s like I’m just trying to do this fuckin’ interview... (para. 72)

The third was ignorance, which Alana took as an opportunity to educate people (para. 92):

...because [her CV] would say...agency name, and then escort, right, and a lot of the times, people...would have to ask: So what, did you go out with people to dinner? You know, a couple people thought that I meant a personal care worker or something, like you know, I would go and escort old people to the grocery store or something...You know, it was kind of funny to have to sorta gently go no, you know, this is what it means...and that’s when sometimes either they would really get silent and go on to the next thing, or they would go: Oh; you know, or they’d try to sometimes put this hyper-natural like: Oh, ok, and you were there for two years, ok; and they were really trying to like: Yep, I’m cool with it, I’m cool with it, I’m just going to act like it’s any other job, it’s fine, it’s fine, it’s fine. You know, trying so hard to just ask the very regular questions that you would ask going through it, but I mean it’s so clear from the way they’d look kind of stricken, and they’re suddenly very straight in their seat, very like, very kinda straight faced, like ok, like they’re trying so hard not to betray any emotion, like: I’m not judgmental, I’m not judgmental, you know and really their going: Oh my god, I can’t believe I’m fuckin’ sitting here with a hooker.

Educating people during interviews did not always go smoothly: *“I think [stigma has] probably kept me poor a couple of times because I think there’s a couple of jobs that I didn’t get, you know, honestly, because people didn’t necessarily want to have that harlot in the office, right”* (Alana, para. 112). Similarly, Jill said: *“when I started looking for jobs, there were places, yeah, that just weren’t going to hire me”* (para. 87).

Additionally, Alana and Jill had a few more barriers to mainstream employment than the other participants: neither is university educated, Jill has a criminal record, and Alana is not yet a Canadian citizen. Both women were strategic in that they took care to apply for jobs in sectors where their experience might be considered valid, and with organizations that were, at least in principal, supportive of sex workers, although in practice, this was not always the case. Jill described one such organization:

I’d initially applied for a counseling position at [a sexual health clinic] ...I didn’t get that job, but I was offered this...research position that included some counseling...I feel very strongly that um, that they offered me sort of a lesser position, lesser in terms of responsibility, hours and time – it was a contract. I feel that they offered me that as a bit of a test. Um, and indeed, talking to the folks who eventually became my colleagues, it was disclosed to me that there were a couple of members of the collective who were really uncomfortable--on paper and in the interview, I had what they needed in terms of information, skills, so forth, but they had been uncomfortable, or uncertain, about the fact that I had been and still was a sex worker. And there was this lingering concern that there was something wrong. There must be something psychologically wrong...something must be off, for this woman who is sitting before us, and clearly could have a straight job, at least in this field...that she hasn’t done that until now... (para. 51)

Given how Jill and Alana’s sex work was perceived in job interview situations, it seems strategically advantageous to omit sex work from a CV. In this respect, Jill and Alana can be seen to have made a political choice in their inclusion of sex work, akin to one of Rickard’s (2001) participants who had listed sex work on her CV to assert its legitimacy. No matter the choice they made however, it was clear that the women put a lot of thought into decisions involving disclosure of their sex work, and further, that such decisions were an important part of

their mainstream employment strategies. We will return to disclosure and stigma management in the coming chapter.

Challenges and changes

Despite being strategic in the search for mainstream employment, participants identified many challenges and changes throughout the transition; as Bertha said, “*there weren’t any small challenges*” (para. 116). Vivian also noted that when she suddenly found herself looking for a new job after she stopped working at the massage parlour, “*everything felt huge and really hard*” (para. 99). The three main (and inter-related) areas of challenge that participants identified were money, schedule, and lifestyle.

Money

Consistent with many studies including Manopaiboon et al. (2003), McIntyre (2002), McNaughton and Sanders (2007), Murphy and Venkatesh (2006), Rickard (2001), and Sanders (2007), the first and foremost challenge for participants was money. Indeed, few mainstream jobs compare to indoor sex work in compensation per hour. Additionally, many of the participants had gone into the ‘helping’ or ‘caring’ professions, which are not generally high-paying. As Bertha said: “*I made a shitload of money before. The milieu that I want to work in, I’m going to make very little money, but I knew that at the time. I knew... that I would never see money like that again*” (para. 190). Not all participants were so perturbed by the monetary aspect of the transition; Jill simply said that she now has less “*discretionary income*” (para. 15).⁵²

Lifestyle

Closely related to money is the lifestyle it affords. In terms of budgeting and spending habits, some participants had more difficulty adjusting than others. Anik had not yet succeeded in paring down her lifestyle and spending habits – “*I spend more than what I make. I really do*”

⁵² It should be noted however that Jill has a managerial position with a good salary and also still sees clients.

(para. 11) – but she was in the unique position of having an inheritance as a buffer for her financial transition. By contrast, most participants found they had to cut back their spending: Vivian missed shopping; Jill had to take fewer cabs; Julie said she “*tried to reduce some of my bills a little*” (para. 115). Although they had acquired certain class markers like higher education or mainstream jobs, participants had to give up the expensive lifestyles that sex work afforded them. For many participants then, transitioning entailed trading financial capital for cultural capital⁵³ (to use Bourdieu’s terminology), or in Goffman’s parlance, moving from more lucrative to more credible jobs. This “contradictory class location” (Wright 1989) will be further examined in the next chapter.

Participants’ difficulty changing their lifestyle was not necessarily related to the amount of money they had made as sex workers. To illustrate this, we look to Bertha and Leila, who both charged very high rates escorting and had a good base of regular clients. Bertha described her lifestyle after living on her dwindling savings for several months:

...it’s not like exorbitant, like I don’t shop anymore for example. I stopped shopping a year ago. As all ho’s know, that’s like a big thing to stop doing you know, like cold turkey, you know what I mean, like I went to thrift stores for the first time in six years. I was like oh my god, the prices have gone up...(para. 7)

Unlike Bertha, Leila’s lifestyle adjustments required a large-scale philosophical shift. After years of working as an escort, she had grown accustomed to spending lavishly on clothing, wine, food, travel, and accommodations:

On my peak of doing a lot of money in the business, I was always wanting more, to have an effet de satisfaction, and I was actually scared at that point because I was like, oh my god, am I ever--my needs, are they ever going to stop? ...and so to quit, to re-adapt my relationship with money, was a key to success for me. I regained the sense of appreciation of just walking in the mountain and breathing fresh air, and just reading a good book, and I mean, even in my choice of traveling...couldn’t go to my favourite spot anymore, like I used

⁵³ As compared to Murphy and Venkatesh’s (2006) description of the transition as a “step down” in autonomy, income and satisfaction, my findings suggest that the transition involved elements of ‘stepping down’ and ‘stepping up’ the class ladder.

to rent a house...in the Bahamas... But now I go do some kayak in Baie St-Paul...but I appreciate it. (Leila, para. 115)

The contrast between Bertha and Leila's difficulties adjusting to their new lifestyles becomes more meaningful when we look at how and when they learned to manage their money. As previously mentioned, Bertha had mentors, whereas Leila had no such resources and bemoaned the fact that even the sex worker organization where she works does not offer comprehensive budgeting information to transitioning sex workers.

Lisa, who had worked in massage, incalls, and as an independent escort, did not find the lifestyle change so drastic, although she did say: *"I was working with less money, but then again, not really, right, because the more you make, sometimes the more you spend [laughs]"* (para. 63). Similarly, Rosie said: *"I have really bad money management skills, I think as a result of working in a cash business"* (para. 262). This lack of money management skills is comparable to the difficulties in budgeting sometimes experienced by workers in other cash- or tip-based jobs, such as waitresses and bartenders.

Certainly, not all the lifestyle changes that participants made had to do with money. Whereas it was something she had enjoyed about sex work, Anik lamented that she now has to make a concerted effort to dress up: *"Oh god, I don't buy nice lingerie anymore. I have beige – awful! [laughs] So you find occasions to wear a pretty dress and pretty shoes and go out. You have to make it happen..."* (para. 71). Bertha also complained that she no longer fit into her fancy (sex work) lingerie and clothes because she has put on weight since becoming a student: *"Sex keeps you fit, yo!"* (para. 128). Julie's sex work clothing changed as well, but for different reasons:

...when you start seeing the same people, it's like you don't really get dressed up so much anymore...there's not the whole performative thing, I mean it's still performance, but it's not sort of a, I have to get dressed [up] to go to work, kinda so much as it used to be... one of my clients was like, I like it when you wear the everyday underwear, and I'm like, really, the

everyday underwear? Like can this get any more mundane? ...now sex work for me is everyday underwear. There you go. [laughs] (Julie, para. 207)

Instead of being caused by a decrease in time spent escorting, as with Bertha, Julie's change in clothing was emblematic of a diminishing excitement for sex work as she transitioned slowly into her academic commitments.

Another change, identified by Jill and Rosie, was a decrease in stress levels. Jill (para. 59) described this feeling as:

...not having to worry about your physical security...and after working for so many years, other than sort of that period of time, maybe three months, after you know this co-worker was killed--that was a heightened sense of alertness and frankly, fear--but aside from that, you know, I hadn't realized that I was living with this sort of low-grade, constant anxiety, not just around physical safety, but also around legal safety. And it wasn't until I stopped advertising and was only seeing regulars where they were super long term regulars, I didn't and still don't have any concerns around safety...I actually felt this shift in--almost felt like a bodily shift. I felt like, a relaxation and I hadn't realized I had this...low-simmer concern.

Rosie expressed it as:

...what surprised me was how much I actually changed, even my--I talked to my analyst about it, and she said I changed a lot as a person... And she was like, you know, you've become way more happy, and you've become more open and you're not so guarded. And I was like yeah, I have become that way, because sex work is like yeah, you have to be really guarded, and you have to be suspicious... (para. 121)

Here, Rosie and Jill's different attitudes towards sex work are apparent. Although both women talked about how they felt less stressed about their security – as Rosie said, less guarded – Rosie identified this as happier, whereas Jill did not.

While perhaps worrying less about their security of person, some participants felt less secure about their income after quitting sex work. For Alana (para. 72),

...security...is wrapped up with money, but also just the knowledge of where is my next, you know, where is my next job coming from? Is it going to last? Because again, the thing with the papers, a lot of the times, I have to work for cash, or I'll get, you know, a contract, like they'll be able to pay me for a finite amount of time...so there's always this kind of, gee am I going to have to go back or what? You know, it's waiting for the other shoe to drop, always.

Alana may be at a disadvantage in the mainstream labour market because of her citizenship situation and her lack of formal education, but participants with more cultural capital did not necessarily feel more secure about their income in the mainstream labour market. Indeed, although they acknowledged that sex work did not provide a consistent income, they were aware of the precarious nature of the mainstream labour market as well. As several scholars have observed, stable jobs are becoming increasingly rare in the contemporary labour market, in the face of the growing proportion of temporary and part-time jobs (see Ilcan 2009; Vosko 2000; Westcott et al. 2006). Compared such unstable mainstream jobs then, sex work can be seen as more secure because its hours are not fixed at a minimum and there is no impending contract expiration, making sex work paradoxically more stable than mainstream work *because its parameters are less fixed*. Even participants who were not self-employed in sex work felt this was true. As Rosie said: *“with escorting, if I don’t feel like going in tomorrow, I don’t really have to. Like if I have an appointment, I’ll get in trouble for missing it, but I’m still gonna have a job, you know?”* (para. 113).

Schedule

Indeed, the relatively rigid schedule of mainstream work proved to be a significant challenge, particularly for Alana and Bertha. As Alana said, she *“had to get used to getting up early. That fucking sucks. Honestly, that’s one of the hardest things for me”* (para. 76). Bertha expressed a similar sentiment:

...changing from being nocturnal to diurnal, was not small. There was nothing small about it, you know. I wanted to vomit every morning, you know what I mean? And I don’t just mean literally, like I wanted to vomit just psychologically. But I mean, just at first physically, you know completely changing my biochemistry to work during the hours I was used to sleeping and vice versa. That was a huge challenge. (para. 116)

Of course, not all the participants found the schedule change this difficult. Rosie, for instance, merely casually mentioned that she had to give up late nights when she started school.

Participants also found they had less free time. Whereas Rosie missed her time for herself when she started school, Vivian found that she was bored “*because all of a sudden I’m seeing my friends less because I had less free time because I’m working more*” and because she found her job as a nanny under-stimulating (para. 51). Jill also missed socializing with friends:

...I would say to my clients, I’m available from X o’clock to Y o’clock...I would just station myself at my work apartment and sort of book clients on sort of a regular schedule. But if I had a no-show or what have you, I could call up a friend, chit-chat here, chit-chat there. If I wanted to take a day off...I could be very spur of the moment, right. Whereas moving to straight jobs, suddenly you’ve got to submit your vacation request... So that was definitely a change. (para. 59)

By contrast, Sara welcomed the change in her schedule: “*I stopped working really late, weird hours*” (para. 11) and “*suddenly had normal sleeping hours and regular eating habits, and all that. Life normalized*” (para. 63).⁵⁴ Not everyone appreciated this ‘normalization’ however.

Alana found it difficult to become accustomed to the banality of mainstream work:

...getting used to just the kind of mundane shit of life, you know, like the way that most people live it, or that many people live it. It’s kind of like, oh wow, this is fucking boring, you know? ...I mean [sex work] can be a good fuckin’ life and it can be a good fuckin’ time. I had fun working, you know? ...[now] it’s just like the hours and minutes are just dragging on, and I think god, ordinarily one hour and I’m home or out or whatever, you know so that’s kind of hard. (para. 76)

The aftermath

Straight jobs

Banal as Alana thought they were, we now turn to the ‘straight’ jobs that participants were interested in and able to secure. Participants had moved into three sectors of the mainstream labour market: health and social services, academia, and the service industry.

⁵⁴ Some of the participants in Rickard’s (2001) study wanted a ‘normal’ life as well.

Alana, Anik, Jill, Leila and Lisa are all in the health and social services sector. Among them, Alana, Anik, Leila and Lisa currently work at sex worker organizations, and Jill works in a health clinic. As already noted, Alana and Jill strategically applied for jobs they thought would hire someone in their position. Anik did not have to apply for her job at the organization where she works: “...when I got the job, I never applied, they just gave me a job, after 4, 5 years of volunteer work, they finally gave me a job...I never had a real job where I had to apply for it” (Anik, para. 99). Because of this, Anik mentioned that she had little experience and knowledge about how to navigate the mainstream labour market; she described this as “*imposter syndrome*” (para. 99). Lisa also started as an intern at the organization where she works, and she, Alana and Jill have all moved between sex worker organizations and healthcare/social work.

Bertha, Julie and Vivian are in the academy. As graduate students, Julie and Vivian have both held teaching and research positions and want to be professors, and Bertha is working part-time for a community organization in addition to going to school.

Rosie and Sara are in the service industry: Rosie is in massage therapy and Sara works at an art gallery. Vivian’s job as a nanny also falls into this category. At the time, childcare appealed to Vivian because “*in terms of all of a sudden quickly making that transition um, you know, like, nannying was good. Nannying is good; it’s successful; it’s available*” (para. 43) and she was already using it as her ‘cover’ job. She described her process of making that job a reality:

So I um, sent out emails, phoned previous babysitting clients seeing if they needed new people. I basically spent a few days like, rallying. I made up a flyer, for nannying services, um, postered my entire neighborhood. Like, I spent like a week basically like trying to... make my anxiety productive. So not having any money and not feeling comfortable doing [sex] work anymore, like what was I gonna do? So I flyered everywhere, started to get calls, started to get babysitting clients, and yeah, that’s what I did. (Vivian, para. 19)

Sara is the only participant who acquired a mainstream job through one of her former clients:

One of my old clients called me, actually, somebody I'd seen once. I'd gone to their apartment and recognized a painting on the wall, and I said, what do you have an [artist's name] painting on your wall for? Cause I have a background in art history, Canadian art history and painting. We could talk painting and it turns out that he knew a lot about art, but as a client, he was not a fit for me, so I didn't see him again. But a year later, he called me: Hey, are you looking to, would you want to manage an art gallery? And I thought, oh, well, it coincided with the fact that I had gotten myself into this relationship and actually, I could use a job. I said: Sure, let's try it and see what happens. That's what happened. (para. 7)

Except for Vivian's job as a nanny, none of these jobs fall into what would generally be considered unskilled labour (for example, fast food chain and retail jobs), a descriptor that is also often used to categorize sex work. Sanders (2007) also found that indoor sex workers transitioned into various occupations rather than unskilled jobs. With the skills they had acquired, the strategies they used and the jobs they found, the women in this study can be seen as rational agents exercising relational autonomy in contemporary capitalism.

Retrospective: Discrimination along the way

A trajectory characterized by relational autonomy involves both successes and limitations as the labour market and an individual's social position allow. In addition to the disadvantages engendered by stigma, participants also suffered other kinds of discrimination. This section examines participants' experiences of racism and sexual harassment in their work trajectories, both in the sex industry and in the mainstream labour market.

Although Vivian and Anik briefly commented on racism in the sex industry, Rosie was the only racialized woman to participate in the study and as such, the only participant who had experienced racism personally. Rosie's experiences of racism at work were not at the massage parlour or escort agency, but rather at a large firm where she was the executive assistant. She described this experience as follows:

...first of all like, I was the only non-white person in that whole building who wasn't like, handling food...it made me feel weird, you know, cause I'm like oh, like, the only people that I spoke to were the people in the kitchen, cause they were all like, ethnic, you know? And I'm

like wow, and I just found it--the people there were really not nice people, like I remember we had this one client from like Emirates airlines, and the contact was this girl Zahra and the one advertising executive in my division, she was always calling me Zahra, and I'm like, my name's not Zahra, that's not my name, and you know I had to tell her several times, and I knew she was just doing it to be insulting, and I was like I don't need to be insulted at work, like I don't care. You don't need to treat me like that...I didn't feel rewarded, I didn't feel, like no matter like, what work I did, and I was doing good work, like I know I'm an intelligent person, and I didn't feel like I was getting any recognition, I didn't see that there was any room for me to move up, so I was like, why am I doing this? (para. 99)

After about a month, Rosie “*had it with that*” (para. 282) and returned to sex work.

Some participants addressed sexual harassment and assault in their work trajectories.

Relative to the other participants, Vivian’s experience at the massage parlour had the strongest influence on her work trajectory. Leila also alluded to how she dealt with customers who crossed her boundaries when she was escorting, whereas Anik was thankful she had never been raped. Julie described her experiences of sexual harassment in two of her mainstream jobs. The first time was in between her two periods of being an escort: “*working at [a fast food chain] for a summer, and then I was sexually harassed by the owner and that ended that*” (para. 91). The second was in her job as a university instructor:

...last time I was teaching, I had a student come into my office, a young man, and he sat down next to me and he felt--he was sitting very close to me, and he felt like it was okay to touch my leg, and I was like, I think my clients, like at this point I've had a lot of different clients and I've certainly worked in some 'seedy' locations in my time, but my clients today really won't touch me without being like is it okay to touch me, they're quite respectful of my boundaries, and I have moments when I teach that I feel more vulnerable...in many cases I feel more powerful and in control as a [sex] worker than I do as an instructor... (para. 171)

That a student, in other words, someone in an inferior position in the hierarchy of the institution, felt entitled to touch Julie’s leg, speaks to the ubiquity of sexism in the mainstream workforce and the ‘straight’ world, just as Rosie’s experience outlined above does with racism.

Concluding comments

In this chapter, I have presented the practical aspects of participants' transitions, from their initial decisions to leave through to the jobs they have now. After comparing my findings to previous studies, two aspects of my participants' transitions align with the literature: first, for the most part, participants had less time and money after transitioning out of sex work than they did before, and second, the transition was a journey influenced by stigma. Overall, my findings confirmed Sanders' (2007) suggestion that the transition is shaped not just by personal desire and commitment, but also structural factors such as the availability of accessible jobs, discrimination and stigma. As Julie said, "*other things have to be in place in your life before you can leave, if that's what you want to do*" (para. 83).

The difficulties participants had with their CVs and with stigma in job searches confirmed Rickard (2001), Sanders (2007) and Bruckert et al.'s (2003) conclusions that although valuable, skills acquired in sex work can be difficult to describe without encountering stigma. This also resembles Murphy and Venkatesh's (2006) suggestion that sex work yields social capital that is not transferable to the mainstream labour market, and here I would add cultural capital as well. However, participants used their skills in mainstream jobs nonetheless, and in this respect, my findings differ from Rabinovitch (2004) and Woodman (2000) who found sex workers to have fewer transferable skills. All this considered, my findings compelled me to reject DeRiviere's (2006) sweeping suggestion that sex work diminishes human capital potential.⁵⁵

While many of the reasons for leaving the sex industry were consistent with the literature, I did not find age (as in Brewis and Linstead 2000; and Escoffier 2007) amongst my participants'

⁵⁵ Again, I recognize that my sampling is likely to be comparably biased (albeit towards the other end of the spectrum) as DeRiviere (2006), Rabinovitch (2004), Woodman (2000) and indeed all the studies I characterized as 'trauma-based.' However, while I acknowledge that post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a serious condition that could affect one's performance and adaptability in the labour market, my findings suggest that it would be inaccurate to assume that all (former) sex workers have PTSD or are otherwise incapable of mainstream jobs.

reasons for leaving. Where my findings really differed was in participants' perceptions and organization of their trajectories. Although going back and forth between sex work and mainstream jobs was discussed in several studies, including Sanders (2007), Manopaiboon et al. (2003), McIntyre (2002), and McNaughton and Sanders (2007), my findings allowed a rejection of the haphazardness attributed to this going back and forth, as well as fixed stages in the transition.

If studies that understand sex work as trauma view transitioning out of sex work as final and successful, 'exit' can be seen to connote 'cure.' It stands to reason then that women who had good (work) experiences in the sex industry do not define transitioning out of sex work as success, or as definitive, because they never saw their entry into, or involvement in sex work, as a failure. In this respect, because each woman's transition involved different reasons, trajectories and circumstances, I suggest that looking at the transition as a multiple, parallel work trajectory involving overlap and gradual change allows for a more in-depth understanding of the intersections of neo-liberalism and stigma. Even participants who left sex work suddenly had to find jobs and re-negotiate their lifestyles and identities, thus elements of overlap occurred in those cases as well. Identity appears to have been the most complex overlap in the transition, and will be examined in depth in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6: NEGOTIATING IDENTITY THROUGH THE TRANSITION

After looking at participants' strategies in their journeys from sex work to mainstream jobs, I now turn to the meaning of the transition. In grappling with the changes to their lifestyles, jobs and incomes in transitioning out of sex work, participants also found themselves negotiating changes in identity. These were difficult changes because "a person's social roles are a major determinant of the conception of self and social identity" (Ebaugh 1988, 20). Considering the broad spectrum of changes participants navigated through the transition, which they described in the last chapter, the transition can be understood as a multiple role change, which in turn affects numerous facets of identity. As I will illustrate, while the relationship between social roles and self-identity is reciprocal, it is not without conflict. Using identity as a lens to examine stigma, presentation and labour across their transitions, I will shed light on the changes in participants' self- and social identities.

Negotiating self-identity

In addition to being occupational, the role of sex worker also has stigmatic and sexual components. This section examines the effects of these components on participants' self-identities⁵⁶ as they relate to sex work, including how they related to sex work as a career and how their sex worker identities carried over into their personal sex lives.

Sex work as a career?

I begin with an examination of how stigma and identity interacted to form participants' definitions of, and relationships with, sex work. In spite of the amount of time participants had spent in the sex industry, their personal attachment to sex work, and their emphasis on the value

⁵⁶ I have used the term 'self-identity' here to speak to the way participants identify *to themselves*, in order to eschew the interchangeability of Ebaugh's (1988) use of 'conception of self' and 'personal identity,' and as distinct from Goffman's (1959 and 1963) definition of 'personal identity' as socially prescribed.

and transferability of the skills that they had acquired, seeing sex work as a job did not always mean that they saw it as a career.

Rather, for some, sex work was a transient occupation. Alana spoke to this when describing her experience working on the street in particular: “...most of us aren’t lifers out there, you know, there are people who are bouncing back and forth...” (para. 84). Rosie did not describe herself as a ‘lifer’ either. For her, sex work was a way to ‘buy time’ to figure out a career path, wherein she only briefly considered making it a career (Rosie, para. 39):

...it was never something that I wanted to do long term. I did think about it a few times, like oh you know, I could invest in a personal trainer, and I could go get implants, and I could do all this stuff, and become like a professional like high class hooker. But then I was just like, you know what, that’s not me...it was always like a transitional thing until I figured out what exactly it was that I wanted to do, because you know...I need to experiment, I need the time to figure out what I want to do with my life, and escort afforded me the opportunity to be able to figure it out, in a way that was like comfortable for me, that I could maintain a good lifestyle.

Rosie’s involvement in sex work can then be seen as facilitating a transitional period in her life, or even as transitional in and of itself. This was also true for Sara: “*The sex work was transitional for me. For me, it was a bridge*” (para. 99). For Vivian, sex work was a short-term solution that deviated from her plans:

...I had transitioned out of [sex work] a few different times where I didn’t necessarily think I’d get back into it...my plan at first was to just do like, web-camming, and then I needed more money and I got more comfortable in the industry so then I started doing other work... I never like, woke up and was like, oh I’m gonna go give blowjobs for money. (para. 11)

Vivian’s narrative resembles Rosie’s in her disassociation with, even rejection of, the proverbial ‘lifer.’ Vivian insisted: “...*this is not my passion. This is not my life... I’m not that person*” (para. 123). Relative to the other participants, Vivian and Rosie had been in the sex industry for the shortest amount of time, and as evinced by their statements above – “*that’s not me*” (Rosie), “*I’m not that person*” (Vivian) – they also had a more ambivalent relationship with it.

Even participants who had been involved in the sex industry for longer periods of time than Rosie and Vivian did not *exactly* describe their sex work as a career. We saw this in the last chapter with Anik wanting to move on to her “*real career*.” Even though Anik really enjoyed being an escort and has been quite public about it, she said sex work “*never was a career choice, it was something like a job you do between, or to pay for your school, or to travel...*” (para. 23). Similarly, for Bertha, “*it was a business*” (para. 7) that she took very seriously, but she “*never planned on being a lifer*” (para. 27).

The women in this study were not the only ones to mention ‘lifers’ in near-derogatory tones; the word ‘lifer’ refers to prisoners serving life sentences, as well as those who spend their entire working lives in military service (*Webster’s* 1984). Colloquially, the latter usage can mean lazy, and is contrasted to ambitious, ‘career-oriented’ members of the military (Lifer n.d.). Applied to sex work then, the term ‘lifer’ is charged with a two-fold stigma: the whore stigma and class contempt. In naming and positioning ‘lifer’ as an undesirable outcome,⁵⁷ it seems as though participants were less committed to, and more ambivalent towards, their roles as sex workers, at least in a temporal sense, in reaction to various manifestations of stigma. Although participants appeared to have been content to play the role of sex worker, they did not want to be ‘branded’ as ‘lifers’; while a history of sex work may make stigma ‘sticky,’ the connotations and consequences (class contempt and stigma) of ‘lifer’ are static.

Not seeing sex work as a viable long-term career also speaks to structural stigma⁵⁸. As we saw in the previous chapter, stigma and criminalization can limit opportunities. In particular, the

⁵⁷ However, it should be noted that several participants described people they knew who were sex industry ‘lifers’ as successful businesspeople and, moreover, that ‘lifers’ did not fit the parameters of this study.

⁵⁸ Hannem and Bruckert define structural stigma as occurring “when stigmatic assumptions become embedded in social policies and practices” (2011, 13).

criminalization of management can be a deterrent from career advancement in the sex industry.⁵⁹

Of this, Jill said:

I would have been super interested in a managerial position in the sex trade. I mean, I now work in management...I would have loved, and would still love to do that in the sex trade... having had the years of experience in different sectors, knowing, you know, about labour rights, labour law, health and safety and all that, I actually think I'd make a kick-ass madam. But I'm not prepared to take that legal risk...(para. 55)

Julie also said she “*might be interested in doing management, but because of the laws...I just don't want to get in trouble with the law in any way*” (para. 35).

Other participants were aware of the (possible) limitations imposed by structural stigma, as we saw in the previous chapter, but internalized stigma also appears to have been a factor in their classification of sex work as a non-career. Even for those who identified very strongly with sex work, or as Ebaugh would say, were committed to that role, regarding sex work as a transitional identity was one way that participants negotiated stigma.

Sexuality

Although sex work proved to be a transitional period for most participants, it was also an opportunity to explore their sexuality in a way that they may not have otherwise, which brought about changes in their sexual identities and/or preferences.

Many participants talked about how they had enjoyed exploring and expanding the scope of their sexuality through sex work. Sara felt much more comfortable and knowledgeable about her sexuality after having spent time as a sex worker: “*I learned all sorts of things about my own sexuality: I have a foot fetish; I love flying bondage; I love topping people as much as I like bottoming. So it really expanded my range of play [laughs]*” (para. 149). Anik described what she will miss in this regard:

⁵⁹ Although sex work management is viewed as Procuring and consequently, criminalized under Section 210 of the Criminal Code of Canada, not all participants were deterred from managing; Anik and Leila both spent time as agency owners.

There's a sexual outlet...I don't know if other people talk about that, but let's say my boyfriend is not the man who eats out a woman ok, he's not like a strong point on cunnilingus, but those guys, they have no problem with that, so now I'm thinking I need to quit that for the rest of my life, and I'm not ready... (para. 15)

She also lamented the sexual opportunities she felt she had missed during her time as an escort:

“because my advertisement was for very straight clients and straight services, but I'm like oh god, why did I retire before doing a double penetration? I mean, where else in my life will I get this chance?” (Anik, para. 15). Sara also missed the adventurousness of sex work, but unlike Anik, she had found a way to compensate for this lack *“by becoming more involved in the women's S/M community, going to fetish nights, or seeking out queer stuff like that helps, finding play partners” (para. 109)*

Instead of feeling like they had to compensate for something they were missing, some participants took what they had learned by experimenting and applied it to their own sex lives.

This was true for Leila:

...I've experimented, and I was lucky enough to find clients that want to experiment, and so yeah, I think I'm more aware of what I do love, and that I can just let myself go, in places that I couldn't imagine, all the scenarios, fantasy, I mean, I would just have sex and wouldn't go there and now it's like wow, it's so huge... (para. 219)

Vivian also expressed a similar sentiment of adventure:

I did like um, the sexual...things I'd never done before. I did sort of miss the surprise of like-- cause you know... You give them the same options...but these men want to do, like different things, you know, that sense of... surprise and like, things that you had never even thought of before. Like you know, some guy wanted me to pull hair out of his body. Stuff like that, like it's sort of hilarious. (para. 63)

It was in this environment that Vivian, who had previously identified as a lesbian, came to find herself becoming comfortable with, and attracted to, men: *“...now I no longer identify as a lesbian, I identify as queer and um, and you know I play with men, and I date men, and some men are really lovely” (para. 71).* Sara also found herself appreciating the chance to experiment

with men while she was in the sex industry, and now identifies as “a lesbian, femme, but I am bi-curious” (para. 173).

For Jill, sex work provided an environment of control, where she could work through previous sexual trauma:

Um, I happened, um to experience sexual abuse as a child, so before I entered the sex trade...I had very strict boundaries, I didn't like to be touched certain ways, certain things I found very triggering. Sex work allowed me to – while in a position of control – um play with those boundaries or expand and pull back those boundaries in a way where um I was able to move through abuse issues very successfully, which I couldn't do with personal partners. I found with partners, although I would say, A, B, C isn't good for me, or let's try 1, 2, 3, I think at least in the relationships I had, personal partners, like sexual partners were so engaged, right and so invested in my emotional or sexual wellbeing that it became very loaded, um and then also they knew what was going on. Whereas I found with clients, they didn't know what I was doing, they were just used to girls – working girls – telling them what they could or couldn't do or saying stop this or do that or don't do that, so it was fine, right. So I was able to you know, sort of, as they say, over time, I got more comfortable, like girlfriend experience, right... I actively and consciously worked up to that, like when I first started working, there was no kissing or cuddling stuff because that was like totally--that would freeze me emotionally. So I was able to work through all that... (para. 115)

In this way, Jill consciously worked through her abuse issues. Vivian also changed how she viewed herself as a sexual being through sex work, but this change was initiated by the way she was received by her customers:

The men always chose me over the other girls...even though I was larger, the men always chose me...I guess I grew up, like as a dyke, as like a fat...lesbian teenager that like, really didn't have any sense of sexuality, any sense of self. Like, high school --like I was funny and smart, I was never hot and attractive, you know...but so like being in this type of environment where these men...like 'normal, straight' men are choosing me, over these girls... it's perversely exciting and it's sort of like this weird um, you know--men never liked me. Like, I really wasn't considered normatively attractive until like maybe five years ago. You know, like, I didn't wear any makeup, I had, like, a shaved head... So that sense of like, power, like sexual power...And then these guys were like, paying me. So I do miss that. (para. 71)

...and I also feel sexy...cause when I started the massage parlour work... I was um, about fifty pounds heavier than I am now, so I guess I was about a size twelve...I didn't necessarily feel that sexy, and then going into the environment and having the men view me really positively, um, even though my sense of self shouldn't be dependant on that, it really did help me psychologically like, I felt really sexy...I felt really, really good. So, um, and I've internalized

that, like I feel good now. Because my weight does fluctuate because of my health, so um--but now I'm like, damn straight, I'm sexy like, size 2, size 12, whatever, right. (para. 127)

We see here that Vivian's sexuality has been influenced by sex work in several ways: her preferences have widened, her confidence has been bolstered, and her gender presentation has changed – she now describes herself as a “*high femme*”. The effect of sex work on Vivian's self-image is comparable to Cooley's “looking-glass self” (1998), in that she has internalized the positive judgment of others about her appearance and has arrived at a sense of pride because of it, and further, she continually anticipates a positive response from others, which makes her feel “*sexy*” at any size.

In all these passages, we see that although participants' sexual skills and experiences were not directly transferable into their subsequent mainstream jobs, participants were able to use them in their personal lives, which consequently influenced their self-identities. For some participants, this allowed for a positive addition to their range of desired partners or activities, in and after the transition. For others, disengagement from the sex industry resulted in these new needs or preferences no longer being fulfilled, either as often or at all. Additionally, and in stark contrast to literature I referred to earlier as ‘trauma-oriented,’ the sexual aspects of sex work indirectly benefitted participants' self-esteem, confidence, and awareness and enjoyment of their sexuality. The incorporation of these new elements into participants' personal lives provided a kind of continuity of self-identity between sex work and their mainstream jobs and roles without branding them as ‘lifers.’

Negotiating the transition out of a stigmatized identity

Even though they were not ‘lifers,’ participants had to deal with the continual spectre of stigma, which Goffman (1963) has described as the burden of discredibility. It should be noted that participants did not *always* experience stigma – as we briefly saw in the previous chapter,

some groups of friends or communities were supportive and non-judgmental. However in public, participants felt they had to exercise constant vigilance in regard to their discredibility. This section examines the move away from a stigmatized identity, including how participants experienced and managed stigma, whether their stigma management changed in their transitions, and how they adapted to their new social identities.⁶⁰

Stigmatized identity

As in the literature, stigma was a recurrent theme throughout the interviews, across participants' transitions and their entire sex work trajectories. Bertha spoke to the powerful and pervasive nature of stigma when she said:

...because of the stigma, every single day of my life, I altered the way I lived, in completely profound ways, whether it's how I've been able to organize myself financially, whether it's about when and where I can say what I want to say, all of these things that I just recently characterized as the skill of discretion, that's the reason I have to live that way, is because of the stigma. (para. 170)

Here we see that to be a sex worker is to live out a stigmatized social role and identity, which impacts many areas of life. Stigma also persists across time – as Lisa said:

As far as the stigmas and outing myself, that's still a struggle, because people, there are still those folks out there who think that sex work is inherently wrong, that there's something inherently wrong about a woman who chooses to get involved in the sex industry (para. 15).

As Lisa's comment indicates, participants' worries about stigma did not correspondingly decrease with their transitions. While Rosie, Vivian and Sara would never want their parents to find out, Anik worried about how stigma will affect her professional future: “...*I live in the fear that eventually, I'll have a big scandal to deal with. I live with this almost-belief*” (para. 123).

Speaking to the lasting nature of stigma, which Hannem and Bruckert describe as “the mark”

⁶⁰ Here, ‘social identity’ can be understood as comparable to both Ebaugh and Goffman’s definitions, as referring to how people are perceived by others. ‘Stigmatized identity,’ and similarly, ‘sex worker identity’ and ‘ex-sex worker identity’ can be understood as incorporating elements of self-identity and social identity, in other words, as amalgams of the internalized and performative aspects of social roles, in this case stigmatized person, sex worker and ex-sex worker respectively.

(2011), Leila said: “*I’ll experience it for the rest of my days. Once you’ve been a sex worker, everybody’s gonna see you as a sex worker*” (para. 179). Leila’s statement is only true, however, for those who disclose very publicly.

Disclosure and stigma management

Goffman (1963) described stigmatized individuals who have not disclosed their stigma as discreditable, in contrast to those who have disclosed and are thus discredited. He further distinguishes the discreditable as having to manage information, and the discredited as having to manage tension (Goffman 1963). Espousing an awareness of this distinction, most participants engaged in partial or strategic disclosure, of which Sara gave a good description: “*I’m careful. I assess if a person can handle stuff*” (para. 83). From this, we see that participants were often able to manage the amount of interpersonal stigma they experienced by assessing people and basing their decision on predicted reactions. Bertha described this decision:

...I still have completely internalized the invisibilization and objectification⁶¹ I’ve lived, and walk around you know, in this extremely silenced manner. So it’s like I’m pre-empting the stigma. I’d say I live in an incredibly whore-phobic environment, which has resulted in me silencing myself, and because I silenced myself, I’ve reduced the level of stigma I experience. And so if I ever go out of the silencing, whether it’s doing a public education thing, or if it’s just someone finding something out about me, yes I will experience stigma at that point. But I would say that I choose to live in a silenced space instead of a stigmatized space. Like, those are our options. (para. 182)

Here, Bertha enumerates three possibilities: silence, in other words, secrecy and the double life that comes with it; voluntary or strategic disclosure; and involuntary exposure, or being ‘outed.’ As the third outcome makes clear, stigma is not always manageable. Even strategic disclosure may yield an unanticipated reaction. As we will see, despite careful consideration about disclosure, participants could not always control or prevent being stigmatized. Although the

⁶¹ It should be noted that Bertha’s use of the word ‘objectification’ was in reference to her feeling objectified by stigmatic assumptions and remarks by people outside the sex industry (for example her classmates making sweeping statements about sex workers when they did not know she was one) and not her clients.

question of disclosure is a continual concern for sex workers, I will only be looking at it within the temporal parameters of my study, that is, in and after the transition.

Leila's disclosure actually came about as part of her job at the sex worker organization. It was an unusually public disclosure for which Leila was unprepared, but she was pleasantly surprised that her family turned out to be supportive:

I called my father and like, daddy, you're gonna see me on television, and I'm gonna say these things, and I wanted you to know it before you know, you learn it from a friend who saw me on television. He's like ok, no problem. I was raised with him, so we're really close and transparent. No problem, my darling. I'm gonna watch it and you join me for a coffee and you know. So I was there, and [the TV program host] was really respectful. The people calling were respectful, [except for] the last woman that called... So I went to meet my father after and I decided that I would...be really explicit about my work, so I wouldn't leave him with mental imagination of what he could interpret. I really wanted to be clear about how do I work, who I've been seeing, how did I start, why did I start, and so... I spoke about four hours, and then he was like, oh my god, he cried. And I was like, oh shit, he's sad. And he was like, I'm so proud of you, like, you kick ass, my daughter, so I was...crying, and so yeah. (para. 159)

Leila was the only participant to fully disclose to her family, but some other participants had also alluded to their involvement in sex work through the occasion of their jobs with sex worker organizations. While Alana appreciated working at the sex worker organization because "*I get to be open about who I am and what I'm about*" (para. 136), she had only told her parents about her peripheral involvement in sex work:

...I was able to tell [my mother], oh, you know I'm answering the phones for an escort agency... I let her know that I had done some dominatrix work, and she knew that I saw fetish clients, but you know, I told her yeah, I don't have sex with them, but I do this, I do that, whatever, and I mean she kind of jokes with me about that. She knows that I do that, but I have kind of told her... I'll let things slip in conversations or whatever, like, I am an escort after all...because we're not face to face a lot, like I'm not sure how much she thinks I'm serious and how much she thinks I'm joking, how much she's joking and how much she's serious. And I think she just doesn't really want to know too much about it either... I mean she certainly knows that I work [at a sex worker organization], and I basically said, in no uncertain terms, you know, they only hire current or former sex workers and of course, I have explained to her, when I say sex worker, this is what I mean. So what she takes away from that, I'm not quite sure... (para. 100)

Lisa, who also works at a sex worker organization, had a similar story:

I've never been out to my family. They know that I'm actively involved in a sex workers' rights organization, that I have worked at escort services working the phones, that I've managed massage parlours, that I've ran agencies, that sort of thing. They know everything but the fact that I've actually been a sex worker. Maybe they know deep down inside, but [laughs]. (para. 51)

For both Lisa and Alana then, their jobs at sex worker organizations played a role in their disclosure. This was also true for Leila.

Other participants had also engaged in partial disclosure with their families. Even though her mother did not react negatively to Julie's dancing, she had not told her mother about escorting. Keeping this secret made Julie feel more distanced from her mother. Although not particularly close with her family, Jill had told them about dancing and dominatrix work, but they had not been very receptive. Here we see that in partially disclosing, participants were able to balance their personal and political integrity – with some vestige of openness and self-representation to counter stereotypical images of sex workers, albeit within limits – without overly burdening the parties to whom they disclosed, while also limiting their exposure to interpersonal stigma. For participants who did not disclose to their families, such as Rosie, Vivian and Sara, their selective disclosure to friends and communities can be similarly viewed.

Some participants used transitioning as an opportunity to re-evaluate their decisions regarding disclosure. This was only an option for those who had been less public about sex work to begin with – for example, having 'come out' on television, Leila could not reverse her decision. Rather, as her comment in the previous section intimated, she was discredited: after her television appearance, Leila said she experienced more stigma in public than she had previously. However, this was an option for Vivian, who talked about her involvement in the sex industry as:

...sort of public and not public at the same time, but when I moved...I decided I wasn't gonna tell people, because I was uncomfortable with the amount of people that knew in [previous

city]. So I decided here, since I'm not doing it, that there's no reason, like I don't need to come up with stories so I hadn't really told people. But I have told some people, because it comes up and it's a weird thing to not mention if you find out that your friend is a sex worker, and I was for many years, so why wouldn't I say it? (para. 91)

Even Jill, who as we saw in the last chapter, usually lists sex work on her CV, found relief in no longer feeling continually compelled to disclose (para. 59):

...my interactions, not with close friends, but with acquaintances or more casual contacts, neighbours, um, bankers, casual people like retailers like you know, in your neighborhood, your community, that shifted. It felt really good to be able to say, I do such-and-such, either just to be able to say it, because there were some circumstances where I didn't actively disclose that I was a sex worker, particularly if I felt there was a concrete risk to those around me, like neighbours or building management etcetera, bank manager, mortgage company, that would have been a no go. So it was certainly nice feeling that I could be open and not have to cover or lie, or even in those situations where as a sex worker, you know, I would disclose, having to always manage that, having to first, you know, decide whether or not the pros and cons of disclosing and then when you do disclose, having to manage that conversation or somebody's emotional or political values-based response, um or just having to do all that education, right. It was nice to get into a cab...and someone saying what do you do, and not having to launch into a big explanation, right. Um, so that was big.

While Jill did not mind disclosing her sex work “*in my day-to-day life, doing that sort of education*” (para. 79), she appreciated the choice in this matter garnered by having a different job. Anik and Julie, who both sometimes did public education about sex work, also described a similar choice in a classroom context. Julie explained this as: “*now I'm kind of at a medium, like I sometimes still go speak as a worker, with a pseudonym, and I'm not super guarded about it, like oh my gosh, don't want people to know my name, but... I don't think I'll, you know, be so forthright anymore...*” (para. 143).

However, not all participants were fortunate enough to make that choice. Bertha's sex work was ‘outed’ at her school:

...basically I was assaulted via cyberspace and someone got into all my personal information and um, all my old work photos and stuff like this, and sent them to everyone at the faculty, so amongst like the police and my family and a bunch of other people...they also sent the photos along with--they stole my identity, and wrote as me, and in the email said: I owe you an explanation for this, now that you've found out I'm a prostitute--there was shame in the

email, and I've never, ever in my life experienced a moment's shame based on what I've done...this person wrote as "me" so I felt it was lose-lose, because if I didn't clean it up, I was enabling people's perspective of a shamed worker, but if I did clean it up, I was engaging, and I didn't care to engage, that's why I hadn't talked to anyone about it in the first place. (para. 116)

I called the dean...because I wanted to send out an email to the student body, just like a three liner saying any email you received from this person are not from them, someone stole their identity and is writing on their behalf... So there was...a little bit of damage control, but in general, I just let it go...I didn't intervene, I didn't proactively, until this year, try and transform anything... (para. 152)

Bertha managed to exert some control over this situation by refuting the cyber-assault exposure and then some time later disclosing on her own terms and eventually doing public education at her school.

As Bertha's story makes particularly clear, even though they were no longer working full time as sex workers, participants still had to manage stigma. The constant vigilance about stigma and considerations about disclosure can be seen as a vestige of participants' sex worker identities that remained as part of their ex-sex worker identities.

Negotiating the ex-sex worker identity

As we have already seen, participants' relationships with 'sex worker' as an identity were (and are) complicated, and shifted over the course of their transitions. This section examines how participants felt about, and performed, their changing identities, from the initial destabilization of identity at the beginning of the transition, to the inter-mingling of the 'old' and 'new' roles, to how they aligned their presentations of self with their new roles.

Transient identities

Some participants found that their identity changed with their jobs. Although this was primarily a shift in social identity, or occupational role, it also had personal implications.

Bertha's identity as a sex worker was tied to the amount of time she was working:

...for me, it's about whether I'm working or not, so when I identified as a sex worker, I was working full time as a sex worker and I was getting 100% of my income from sex work, and that's what I did my whole life...when I started working once a month...it felt like a very secondary aspect of my life. I didn't even feel like I was working anymore. (para. 7)

Jill also felt her identity shift once she entered mainstream work:

I had an identity...and a sense of self, and also a bit of a, like, career path related to some of the advocacy and political work I had done around sex work, but I hadn't really recognized how integral being a sex worker was to my sense of self. You know, most of my friends were sex workers or were somehow involved in the sex workers' rights movement. Um, so much of my life had been built around who could be in my life and who couldn't, because of this, right, uh so that was big for me. I really felt a sense of disconnect um, when I first was in the straight job, even though I was out about having been a sex worker, even though I still saw regular clients. That was a big adjustment for me. (para. 23)

Julie, who also still sees clients, described her simultaneous participation in sex work and mainstream work as a “*funny middle ground*” (para. 7).

While Bertha's comment speaks to her time commitment to sex work, Jill's to her self-identity, and Julie's to her ambivalence, Rosie's comment – “*if you have a job, that's what your life is*” (para. 113) – can be seen to incorporate all of these elements. As we have seen, stigma is also an important element of the sex worker role. In this regard, Bruckert has insisted that “the occupational stigma [of sex work] is constructed as a personal attribute so that the implications extend beyond the sphere of work and the label becomes a master status” (2011, 71). At the same time, the West is thoroughly invested in identifying people *as* their occupations, as the maxim “you are what you do” attests – indeed, as one of the first pieces of information asked of a new acquaintance, occupation makes up a significant part of a person's social identity.⁶²

Trying to reconcile these perspectives – in other words, the identity, stigma and labour elements of sex work – leaves sex workers in an awkward ‘middle ground’ indeed.

⁶² Sex workers are not alone in having their occupations taint their perceived personal attributes: used car salesmen are thought to be ‘seedy’; doctors are thought to be superior to nurses in moral and social worth instead of merely in the hierarchy of the healthcare system; unemployment is often thought to be due to a personal failing rather than a structural problem.

Hangover identity

Some participants talked about how they had identified so strongly as sex workers and had become so accustomed to this identity that it was difficult to relinquish. Ebaugh referred to this as a “hangover identity” (1988), which can be difficult to integrate into a new social role. When Alana was talking about getting her job at the sex worker organization, she expressed her ambivalence:

[The job] allowed me to kind of stop working, which is funny because, you know, they're mostly looking for sex workers here. So I'm actually kind of in a weird place with it. Um especially like for example I'll help facilitate a group where it's all active sex workers and you know I almost feel kinda in between. (para. 11)

Anik also found it difficult to take on an ex-sex worker identity because of the proximity of her mainstream job to sex work: “*actually working at [a sex worker rights organization] also makes [transitioning] harder, because it's not like you... just move on to something totally different and don't think about it. It's in my face every day*” (para. 15). Indeed, Anik was still attached to her sex worker identity:

...it's the identity factor: I have loved being an escort...I still go out, like yesterday I went out to a sports bar to watch the hockey game, and I see those four guys at the end and I'm like, they look like clients... And just this thing of looking at people as potential clients in a way, in a crowd or wherever you go. I don't know when it will [stop]. So I guess the identity thing is something also that makes it harder to move out. (para. 7)

Just as Bertha and Jill had worked in the sex industry for their whole adult/working lives, Anik had been a sex worker for sixteen years. She said that this made it harder for her to transition as well: “*It really is a part of me*” (Anik, para. 19). Like Anik and Alana, Lisa works at a sex worker organization, which sometimes makes her feel ambivalent:

I would sometimes get jealous when I would hear the great amounts of money that women were making. I wish I had those days, but I knew it was always going to be, or I felt at the time and I still feel--I've been in business 21 years off and on right so it's a part of who I am that...I know I can--I won't turn down money. I know I have a certain effect on men. I always have. I probably always will (para. 47).

As Lisa's comment illustrates, experiences shape identity and in this regard, participants probably always will identify in some way with sex work.

Ex-sex worker identity

Ebaugh describes the continuity of identity across social roles as "the reestablishment of an identity in a new role that takes into account one's ex-role" (1988, 1). Participants' ex-sex worker identities, while not yet firmly established, were both personal and public, and took different forms. Leila, Jill, Anik, Alana and Lisa, and to a lesser extent, Bertha and Julie's ex-sex worker identities involved activist elements, and in this respect, they continued to publicly identify in some way with sex work, as we saw in the earlier discussion of disclosure. This can be likened to Goffman's (1963) description of the "professional," a stigmatized person who has made a 'career' of representing their stigma category.⁶³ For Vivian, Rosie and Sara, who had disclosed more selectively, their ex-sex worker identities were relatively silent and took on a more mainstream character.

Because, as I have already noted, the negotiation of social and self-identity is less urgent than practical elements of the transition such as income replacement, in addition to the fact that most of the participants were still in the midst of their transitions, their new identities were not fully developed or divorced from sex work. Recalling Jill's comment in the previous chapter about how she does not want to leave the sex industry, some participants' identities may never move away from sex work completely. Jill's commitment to her sex worker role is also still strong, as contrasted to Anik, who is "*very close [to quitting sex work altogether], about to do my last call*" (para. 19). Because of this, Anik is starting to identify as an ex-sex worker: "*being an ex is not as cool [laughs]*" (para. 7). She is "*nostalgic*" about sex work but "*would not go back for real*"

⁶³ In this instance, 'career' refers to an activist career or long-term involvement (like being a spokesperson of sorts for a stigmatized group) and not a long-term occupational categorization.

(Anik, para. 55). Although Anik is not quite there yet, she is resigned (if reluctantly) to becoming an ex-sex worker, a goal that Jill does not share. Leila never had a particular goal of leaving sex work behind completely either: “*Y avait pas de pause que j’ai fait comme, I’m never gonna do that again*” (para. 47).

Just how sex work fit into their ‘new’ identity varied amongst participants. Although Rosie never thought of sex work as a career, it informed her career path and identity by allowing her to discover her passion:

And yeah... I feel really good when I massage people, and I feel really good like you know, when I talk to people and help them with their problems and stuff like that, so that’s kind of like what I feel I’m on this earth to do. And it took me a weird way to get here, because if I had never become a prostitute, I never would have worked in a massage parlour, and then I never would have found out that what I really want to do is massage people. So, I think everything works in a roundabout way. (para. 222)

Here we see that Rosie’s mainstream worker identity grew out of her sex worker identity, and as such, remains an important component of how she identifies as a ‘carer.’ Rosie was amongst the participants who had spent the least time in the sex industry and in this regard, can be seen as having been less committed to the role and more willing to relinquish it, in contrast to Anik, who is having a difficult time ending her relationships with her two remaining clients. In Rosie’s identification as a ‘carer,’ Anik and Jill’s continuing relationships with their regulars, and the positive reinforcements to several participants’ sexual confidence and self-image, we see that they were able to retain certain “side bets” (Ebaugh 1988) from sex work.

At the same time however, participants’ identities seem to have been challenged or destabilized by their new jobs and social roles. Compared to the practical elements we saw in the last chapter, the personal identity aspect of the transition seems relatively disorganized. Recalling the relational autonomy of the neo-liberal labour market, it would seem much more necessary to have an organized, strategic work trajectory and settle into a job in order to earn a

living. With identity, it seems as though participants could afford to take more time to adjust to their ‘new’ social roles and reconcile them with their ‘old’ (sex worker) roles.

Presentation of self

Accompanying the shift in social role was a change in presentation of self. Most participants found they had to adopt a ‘mainstream’ presentation of self to accommodate their new ‘mainstream’ social identities. This included behaving and dressing differently. Rosie described the changes in the way she interacted with people:

[talking about her colleagues at the incall] we can just talk about anything. I find it a nice environment. I really like the people I work with, and just going from that into like a school environment where it's like oh, I can't be so open anymore and you know, sometimes I make kind of crude jokes...so it was also that, having to kind of censor my personality a little bit, and also it was hard to find places or ways to connect with people, cause when you're working in sex work all the time, like you know, if you have a job, like that's what your life is, right, that's what you think about. And then I'm like, oh, I can't talk about sucking dick with my classmates [laughs] and even if I did, they would think I was like, crazy, right. So it was also like trying to find other things to, you know, connect with people about. So I started reading the paper more, talking about current events. (para. 113)

This new way of interacting with people was much more difficult for Bertha, who had spent more time in the sex industry than Rosie. Whereas before she had prided herself on being “*miss fucking queen of discretion*” (para. 39), Bertha has yet to become accustomed to professional networking, or as she calls it, “*schmoozing*” (para. 39). At the beginning of school, Bertha “*started not talking to people from day one*” (para. 178), initially to avoid having to conceal her sex worker identity, and later because she found that she “*had a particularly straight and immature year [cohort]*” (para. 108). This was difficult because:

...studying and going to an environment five days a week where I was completely invisibilized and/or objectified, because anytime that there was reference to myself and my communities, and our relationships with the law, it was discussed by people in an othering, demeaning and dismissive manner. So this led to um, to mental health problems... (para. 108)

Between identifying less as a sex worker because she was working much less, not feeling able to talk about sex work at school, and not identifying with her peers, Bertha felt invisible. This had serious consequences: “*I didn’t know I could go into a dark place like that*” (Bertha, para. 132). Bertha’s experience attests to the difficulty of role change and highlights a pitfall of the transition: the loss of a significant part of one’s identity.

Although transitioning necessarily involves elements of loss, it also requires the adoption of new behaviours in order to successfully perform the new role. In addition to having to change their ways of socializing, participants also found themselves changing other aspects of their presentation of self. Jill had to consider how to project her new social identity through her choice of clothes because:

I didn’t have a whole lot of like, hittin’ the street clothes – not street sex work but sort of like, civilian wear, because...the last five years or so, I worked out of my own place...you know, I’d get in to work and I’d throw on like a little cocktail dress, or you know I would just have my lingerie and something casual overtop, um so I didn’t have like a lot of you know, street-wear... I didn’t have a lot of work, or more conventional work, attire. Uh so that was something big. I had to sort of think about all that. (para. 59)

Alana also noticed a change in the way she dressed but described it more as a chance to relax about her appearance:

...when I was working for the agency, I would absolutely not leave the house without, you know, full makeup, full hair because, oh god, what if I ran into one of my clients?...am I going to have to do a new photo shoot if I, you know, or wow, I’m gonna see a regular I haven’t seen in a few months, what if you know, is he gonna say I’ve gained five pounds...Like at an agency, you know, you’re this package, you’re this product...you have stats up online and when people order you, they want it to match up...if you show up and you look nothing like your picture, there’s gonna be the reviews or whatever, so it’s nice to not have to worry about, you know, oh my god, did I get a bad review...But I find it is a bit of a relief, but it’s almost kind of weird too. I almost let it go too far the other way, like I almost let myself go a bit... (para. 124)

Although she enjoyed the relief in no longer being a “*package*,” it seems as though Alana felt ambivalent about this change. With all the adjustments the participants made in the way they

presented themselves, as with Alana, there appears to have been a discrepancy in the way they presented and the way they identified.

With all the changes in behaviour, presentation of self, and lifestyle (as we saw in the previous chapter), participants encountered many points of conflict. In the course of their transitions, participants found themselves relinquishing some upper-class markers, such as luxury fashion, for others, like graduate degrees and managerial job titles. Thus, the transition was effectively a trade between financial and cultural capital and with it, a change in class location. The particular effect of sex work on identity and social role then seems to be the continual presence of an absence: as sex workers, participants lacked cultural capital, and as mainstream jobholders, participants' financial capital diminished. Whether experienced as an identity void, from which Bertha had suffered, or a "*sense of disconnect*" (Jill, para. 23) as Jill felt early in her transition, or merely as ambivalence, as with Julie, Lisa, Alana and several other participants, the transition seemed to engender a "contradictory class location" (Wright 1989) that had ramifications on identity.

Worker identity

In addition to exposing them to stigma and consequently influencing their work trajectories, sex work had an impact on how participants identified as labourers. As I will discuss, participants' location outside the mainstream labour market, as full time sex workers, enabled a critical analysis of it. This 'outsider' perspective informed the ways participants identified with and at work.

In particular, how participants felt (or did not feel) valued at work was shaped by their experiences in sex work. This was in addition to their challenges with lifestyle and budgeting changes, which we saw in the last chapter. Vivian described this as: "...*really hard to,*

psychologically, to go from a job where I feel that I'm being paid well, at least that I'm being paid adequately, to all of a sudden going to a job where um, it's hard. Nannying is hard work, and I wasn't getting paid very well" (para. 43). An important part of their relationship to work was their relationship to money, and hence the valuation of their labour it reflected. Alana said:

I get this whole different relationship with [money], right, whereas when you're sitting there waiting, waiting and then every two weeks there's this little disbursement or whatever, it's a very different feeling than--it's like oh, you know, you've always got this cash, or gee I need to make, oh I'm just gonna go run out and go see this guy and come back with a few hundred bucks...the biggest thing, is the um, you know the emotional attachment to the money and the kinda you know, it plays into this whole, like, oh wait a second, so I'm gonna go through all this shit and deal with all these assholes, and then at the end of this two weeks I'm going to get this little pittance, that really, compared to what I could make just walking out there and whatever, it's a fucking joke. (para. 31)

All of the participants expressed sentiments similar to Alana's about the mainstream labour market being a "joke" and many also felt less valued in it than in the sex industry, making this a significant part of the "role residual" (Ebaugh 1988) left by sex work. With this residue came a heightened awareness of the realities of the neo-liberal labour market, namely that "hard work does not always pay" (Gingrich 2008, 385). This did not mean that they did not feel rewarded in their mainstream jobs; Alana was equally satisfied with working as an escort and working at the sex worker organization, and this was the case for Leila as well. Obviously, some participants did feel less rewarded by their mainstream jobs. As Bertha said, "*it's fucking hard now, you know, to like do something you're half interested in, or you know, work these really long hours for very little pay, you know, it's not as fun"* (para. 223).

Whether satisfied with their mainstream jobs or not, participants retained a resistant worker identity from sex work, which Jill (para. 59) described as:

...this knowledge that I will always have the means to support myself if necessary, and not only is that de facto, sort of a really positive place to be in, but it's made me um, really sort of look after myself and my needs in straight jobs, right, because frankly, I'm not going to put up with any shit. I'm not going to stay at a job I don't like, or I'm poorly treated, or not paid

well, or with anything, um, because I don't have to, right... I know that I could say fuck you, walk out the door, and whether it's an ad on Craigslist, whether it's standing on the corner, whatever it may be, I can support myself. Um, that's a kick-ass feeling, and I've exercised that, too. I've left jobs in even the last few years where I'm like yup, you know what, this isn't working and I don't have to be there...during those times, I've actually looked for straight jobs, and I've ended up moving from one straight job to another, but I have been in positions of you know what I'm gonna give it another month, and if I don't get another straight job, I'm leaving anyway, I'm giving my notice, so I was totally prepared to do that.

Through identifying as resistant workers, participants were able to retain some of the independence that they had enjoyed in the sex industry, in the face of poor work conditions in the mainstream labour market, whether it took the form of changing mainstream jobs or returning to sex work. In this respect, there is also an element of empowered agency in the resistant worker identity. As Rosie said when she quit her office job to return to sex work, “*Why should I bust my ass for some company that doesn't give a shit about me?*” (para. 71).

At the same time as they were critical of the mainstream labour market, participants had also gained a heightened awareness and appreciation of the performance of identity at work. Vivian spoke powerfully to this when she said:

Well it's similar in a lot of ways, I mean you gotta pimp yourself out to the academy in a very similar way. You're applying for jobs, you wanna get hired just like you want the men to choose you. Like seriously, like it's really... It's very similar. You know, you gotta get dressed in a certain outfit. You know, they're different outfits, but it's still an outfit. You gotta like, go in, you gotta perform, you gotta say the right things, like, you know. I mean, they're both me, like the sex worker me and like, you know, I want to be a professor. That's also part of me. But they're, even though they're expressed slightly differently, they're very, very similar parts of me. They're very similar. Um--so I mean I think that like, everybody's a sex worker. (para. 107)

Although participants may have felt less valued in their mainstream jobs, Vivian's comment suggests that their sex work experiences enabled them to present themselves and perform very effectively in any work context. This suggestion is supported by the successes they encountered in the mainstream labour market despite the obstacles they faced, as we saw in the last chapter.

At the same time as identifying as resistant workers, participants were able to play the role of a

discerning and effective worker, or as Rosie facetiously remarked, a “*contributing member of society*” (para. 19).

Concluding comments: Fractured identities and multiple roles

In the similarities, discrepancies and fluidity between social role, self-identity and social identity, each is tied to the other in such a way that a change in social role precipitates a renegotiation and reconfiguration of fractured identities. Similarly, Goffman (1959) has described everyday life as a roster of context-specific performances of ostensible selves, wherein no directions are given to guide the performance of a new role, so that the inductee finds themselves faced with both a learning curve and unforeseen similarities. As we have seen in this chapter, the negotiation of identity through the transition out of sex work can be similarly described, in that participants took on some new practices while retaining other ones from their previous configurations of identities; while participants modified their appearance and behaviour, they retained elements of their sex worker identities in the areas of sexuality and self-esteem, stigma management, and worker resistance and empowerment. In other words, participants’ social identities were more transformed than their self-identities.

Because most participants are still in the process of transitioning however, their ex-sex worker identities have not yet been firmly established, leaving them in ambiguous territory. Although they could successfully ‘play the part’ in their new roles, evinced by the changes they made in their presentations of self, many participants had a difficult time ‘letting go’ of their sex worker identities. In this respect, the identity transition was characterized by conflict, as we saw in participants’ ambivalence about many aspects of the transition, both in this chapter and the previous chapter. Additionally, the relative ‘respectability’ of their new jobs, along with the ‘stickiness’ of stigma and the decrease in pay in the transition, left participants in a

“contradictory class location” (Wright 1989). For these reasons, ‘making sense’ of the new reconfigurations of their identities seems to be a difficult and as yet unresolved process.

CONCLUSION

My own transition is an ongoing process that has not been without conflict either. Over the course of this project, there were many moments when the theory and bureaucracy of the academy made me forsake my decision to transition into mainstream work, when I wanted to go back to the mellow days, red lights and busy nights of the strip club. In those times, I remembered how much language like “totally ensnared” (Mansson and Hedin 1999) in “the sexual exploitation trade” (McIntyre 2002) felt like a slap in the face. Then, as the project gained momentum, I came to realize that I was gathering together a substantive rebuttal to the scholars with whom I so viscerally disagreed, who believe the sex industry is always and only something that must be escaped. As such, in this last chapter of my thesis, I will reflect on my findings and how they contribute and relate to the literature. After considering the extent to which I answered my research questions, I will identify possible avenues of future research.

First however, I would like to applaud the women who participated in this study, and their successes in the sex industry and the mainstream labour market. Although I only interviewed ten women, there are very likely many more like them in Canada, who are not ‘sob stories,’ and whom I hope will participate in future research or tell their stories in another forum. At the same time, I am not arguing that my findings disprove or discredit the voices of sex workers whose experiences are not reflected in this study. Instead, I want these stories to be viewed alongside other stories and perspectives, and I hope that this project invites more interest in portraying the full range of experiences in the sex industry. What can be learned from my participants’ stories is that working in the sex industry can develop a variety of skills that can be applicable in many subsequent pursuits, and also impacts various social roles and facets of identity. Among these (perhaps unsurprisingly) are work and sexuality.

As resistant workers, participants transitioned in and out of the sex industry according to whether their needs were being met at work. While acknowledging that mainstream work may be “*not as fun*” (Bertha, para. 223), the pay “*a fucking joke*” (Alana, para. 31), and that when “[y]ou’re applying for jobs, you wanna get hired just like you want the men to choose you” (Vivian, para. 107), participants also felt empowered to exercise resistance in a negative work environment – as Jill said, “*I’m not going to put up with any shit*” (para. 59). Thus, in addition to noting the security they felt in being able to return to sex work at any time, participants developed an expectation to be valued and respected in a work context, and a realistic outlook on the neo-liberal labour market.

Participants’ stories also suggested that sex work can be sexually exciting and even improve self-confidence and mental health. Several participants noted the sexual adventure and expertise that sex work allowed them to explore and develop. Indeed, many of their stories forcefully contradicted the ‘trauma-oriented’ literature and stereotypes of sex workers as damaged and deviant. Particularly notable in this regard were Vivian’s development of a positive self-image through sex work (which she retained even after her bad experience at the massage parlour), and Jill’s use of her time with clients to work through her earlier experiences of sexual abuse.

Taken together, participants’ stories suggest that sex work can be an important part of a work trajectory, in and of itself or parallel to a mainstream job, that can also provide certain opportunities (via time and money) while limiting others (via stigma). In particular, my findings suggest that criminalized indoor sex workers exercise considerable strategy and agency in securing jobs in the mainstream labour market, at the same time as they are fully aware of the constraints of their social position.

In this regard, I have answered my principal research question: my findings have indicated that women in criminalized indoor sex work leave the industry through a multi-faceted transition characterized by overlap between sex work and mainstream jobs, sometimes with sex work as a parallel course to their mainstream career. The transition is navigated around and through stigma. Sex work also ‘marks’ women’s identities in various ways.

As this study focused exclusively on women, I cannot be entirely certain as to the extent to which gender played a role in the transition. To address this fully would require a comparative study of women, transsexual/transgendered persons and men transitioning out of sex work. However, I can say that the choices made by the women in this study responded to their immediate financial needs (in entering or re-entering the sex industry) and their longer-term planning needs (by securing jobs with benefits and career paths), whilst largely enabling them to evade the effects of the feminization of labour (such as low-paying service industry jobs) and the discriminatory practices of “work culture” (Green 2005) of the mainstream labour market. In these respects, gender played an indirect, but not insignificant, role in participants’ transitions.

Although my research indicates that the sex industry is no more discriminatory than the mainstream labour market (indeed, Rosie appears to have experienced more racism in the latter than the former), further research focusing on racialized women transitioning would enable a more thorough analysis. My research also showed (dis)ability to have directly and indirectly affected the transition; while Vivian worked in the sex industry when she was too ill for a full time mainstream job, Jill decided to pursue mainstream work to have the opportunity to access health benefits in the event that she became too ill to work. Finally, Alana’s job opportunities were constrained because of her immigration status.

In short, stigma, gender, race, nationality and (dis)ability were all found to play a role in the transition. Participants' class locations both influenced and were influenced by the transition, since the stigma of sex work destabilizes and demotes a person's class status (this is in some respects conditional on disclosure), subsequently entailing a transition from financial to cultural capital that results in a "contradictory class location" (Wright 1989).

In addition to contributing substantively to knowledge about the transition out of sex work, this project also identified future avenues of research and community needs. With respect to the latter, my participants resoundingly voiced an unmet need for non-judgmental support services for people transitioning individually (as opposed to by court order through an 'exit' program) out of sex work. These could take the form of courses on such topics as budgeting and investing, as Leila suggested, or through an informal referral service, managed by sex worker organizations, geared towards putting transitioning sex workers in touch with mentors.

In terms of further inquiry, the foremost avenue of follow-up for this project would be a quantitative study on the transition out of sex work. Studies on racialized women's transitions, as well as men's and transsexual/transgendered persons' transitions would also contribute important perspectives and enable comparison to my findings. Similarly, comparative studies on instances of discrimination and sexual harassment in the sex industry versus the mainstream labour market would enable assumptions about the sex industry to be addressed through the lens of workplace practices. Additionally, themes that surfaced in participant interviews that could not be fully explored in my thesis, such as the relationships between sex workers and their clients, sex workers' intimate relationships, sex work and disability, and the performance and commodification of ethnicity in the sex industry, would also be interesting topics for future research.

At the close of this project, I cannot help but reflect on the inspiration for my title, the film *Not a Love Story*, and how much has happened since it was made in 1981. It was around the same time that Scarlet Harlot, a famous sex worker activist, coined the term “sex worker,”⁶⁴ vowing that “from now on, it would be different” (Leigh 1997, 228). Indeed, it is; I am happy to say that this project forms part of a great many voices arguing for a labour perspective on sex work that have developed since then.

I must also admit that the impetus for this project (and in fact, for pursuing graduate education altogether) was my own personal ‘research’ question, as I found myself wanting to transition out of sex work: what do I do now? At the time, all I knew about transitioning was that it was marked by an absence; I had always assumed that if someone no longer came to work, she must be doing something else, but my own internalized stigma made me imagine her in the drudgery of some low-paying, ‘unskilled’ job. During my interviews for this study, hearing the resourcefulness and successes of my participants surprised and impressed me, and also made me embarrassed about the bleak futures I had previously imagined for my colleagues and myself. Thus, despite the hurdles of stigma, criminalization and isolation, I have found sex workers to be amply able to integrate successfully into the mainstream workforce, even as they have challenged the very meanings of transitioning and success in doing so. Although there remain some conflicted feelings about sex work, transitioning, and perhaps especially identity, amongst my participants, for the most part sex work seems to have been an experience that contributed positively to their lives. With this in mind, I give the last word to Rosie (para. 258):

Just the skills I’ve learned, the things I’ve learnt, the experiences I’ve had. That stuff. Being able to also see men and see such a variety of human beings, and see the foibles of human beings...because I think, you know, we all get trapped within our certain, you know, community, our friends, our peer group, right, our age group... So then we think...this is my

⁶⁴ Leigh estimates that she coined the term “[i]n 1979 or 1980 [when] I attended a conference in San Francisco by Women Against Violence in Pornography and Media” (Leigh 1997, 229).

world... But there's so much more out there. There's all kinds of people from all different places who have all different experience and you know like meeting so many different kinds of people and being that close with that person, and like getting to have a dialogue and getting to know just a little bit. I'm like, it really opened up the world for me, I think, and it made me...a more like, empathetic and forgiving person...cause [before] I was like...if a man is seeing an escort, he's cheating on his wife, and then to actually talk to a guy and be like, oh you're seeing an escort because your wife is ill, or your wife is cold, or your wife has given up on the marriage, or whatever, your wife has let herself go, and all this stuff, and like, you're still a human being and you still need intimacy and sex, and having empathy for that person... And like, having empathy for the person who stutters, you know, and having empathy for the person who has such a severe sinus problems that...he can't talk—like ...whatever the fuck it is, right. And it's like, seeing those kinds of people and like, having empathy for them you know, like understanding that life is not all about what I see in my immediate surrounding, like life is so varied, you know, and that's an amazing experience to have, to...find love for people I think. That's what I found...I always try to live my life that way and be like, I have love for everyone...it's like, when you see someone in that state of like, they're totally naked, both physically and psychologically with you, it's really kind of humbling in a little way, I feel. I'm like, oh, you just need love and attention. We all just need love and attention... And yeah, I really am glad for that experience.

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Research Grants and Ethics Services

Ethics Approval Notice

Social Sciences and Humanities REB

Principal Investigator / Supervisor / Co-investigator(s) / Student(s)

<u>First Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>	<u>Role</u>
Christine	Bruckert	Social Sciences / Criminology	Supervisor
Tuulia	Law	Social Sciences / Women's Studies	Student Researcher

File Number: 03-10-06

Type of Project: Master's Thesis

Title: Exiting Stigmatised Labour in the New Economy

Approval Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Expiry Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Approval Type
07/16/2010	07/15/2011	Ia

(Ia: Approval, Ib: Approval for initial stage only)

Special Conditions / Comments:

N/A

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Research Grants and Ethics Services

This is to confirm that the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board identified above, which operates in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and other applicable laws and regulations in Ontario, has examined and approved the application for ethical approval for the above named research project as of the Ethics Approval Date indicated for the period above and subject to the conditions listed the section above entitled "Special Conditions / Comments".

During the course of the study the protocol may not be modified without prior written approval from the REB except when necessary to remove subjects from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) pertain to only administrative or logistical components of the study (e.g. change of telephone number). Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes which increase the risk to participant(s), any changes which considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project and safety of the participant(s). Modifications to the project, information/consent documentation, and/or recruitment documentation, should be submitted to this office for approval using the "Modification to research project" form available at:
http://www.rges.uottawa.ca/ethics/application_dwn.asp

Please submit an annual status report to the Protocol Officer 4 weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to either close the file or request a renewal of ethics approval. This document can be found at:
http://www.rges.uottawa.ca/ethics/application_dwn.asp

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Office at extension 5841 or by e-mail at: ethics@uOttawa.ca.

Signature:

Isabelle Robert,
Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research
For Barbara Graves,
Chair of the Social Sciences and Humanities REB

APPENDIX B

Interview Guide

Open invitation to speak:

Can you please tell me about your process of transitioning out of the sex industry? I am interested in hearing you describe your journey.

Were there different stages or periods of your transition? Can you go through them in terms of what you did and how you felt?

Follow up questions

Before leaving the industry

Please discuss your decision to transition out of the sex industry. Why? What were the circumstances?

Can you describe the day you decided to move from sex work to another kind of job?

Describe the process of starting to leave sex work.

Did you leave the industry more than once? How many times? Why?

After leaving the industry

What did you do when you left the industry?

How did you feel about leaving the sex industry?

Who supported you? Who did not?

Describe what your first job after the sex industry was like.

What were your big and small challenges during this time?

Describe any adjustments you made.

What surprised you about your transition?

Do you still keep in touch with anyone you met in the sex industry? Why or why not?

Stigma questions

What did you put on your resume when you were looking for jobs outside of sex work?

Have you ever been public in any way (or told anyone) about being a sex worker? Why or why not?

How and when have you experienced stigma?

What role did stigma play in your transition?

Do you still feel or experience stigma? How?

Retrospective questions

What do you do now? How does it compare to sex work?

What job have you felt the most satisfied with and why?

Do you still do sex work? How often? How long do you think you'll go on for?

How do you feel about sex work now?

What skills did you learn as a sex worker? Have you found those skills useful in later jobs?

What were the benefits of your time in the sex industry?

What were the drawbacks?

Wrap-up question

I know you have gone through this material but would you be able to briefly summarize your work trajectory starting when you first started working in the sex industry

Demographics

How old are you?

How would you describe yourself in terms of gender, sexuality and ethnicity?

Are you in a relationship? Do you have children?

APPENDIX C

List of Codes

Number of Nodes: 53

1 attitudes towards work	40 (5.2) /Relationships/parents and family
2 benefits of sex work (SW)	41 (5.3) /Relationships/clients
3 bio	42 (5.4) /Relationships/SW colleagues and community
4 current SW involvement	43 (5.5) /Relationships/mainstream colleagues
5 disability and illness	44 (5.6) /Relationships/friends
6 disclosure	45 (6) /Challenges and changes
7 drawbacks of SW	46 (6.1) /Challenges and changes/money
8 ethnicity	47 (6.2) /Challenges and changes /schedule
9 job satisfaction	48 (6.3) /Challenges and changes /lifestyle
10 privilege	49 (6.4) /Challenges and changes /criminal record
11 racism	50 (7) /Identity
12 resume content	51 (7.1) /Identity/sexuality
13 skills	52 (7.2) /Identity/hangover identity
14 social acceptability of transition	53 (7.3) /Identity/pre-SW identity
15 straight jobs now	
16 support systems	
17 SW as a career?	
18 SW jobs	
19 thoughts about the sex industry	
20 trajectory	
21 violence	
22 (1) /Feelings about transitioning	
23 (1.1) /Feelings about transitioning/conflicted	
24 (3) /Stigma	
25 (3.1) /Stigma/in job hunting	
26 (3.2) /Stigma/in public	
27 (3.3) /Stigma/from feminists	
28 (3.4) /Stigma/housing	
29 (3.5) /Stigma/about job	
30 (3.6) /Stigma/from colleagues	
31 (3.7) /Stigma/at school	
32 (3.8) /Stigma/from community	
33 (3.9) /Stigma/in healthcare system	
34 (3.10) /Stigma/shame	
35 (4) /Reasons for leaving	
36 (4.1) /Reasons for leaving/burnout	
37 (4.2) /Reasons for leaving/impetus to exit	
38 (5) /Relationships	
39 (5.1) /Relationships/partners	