

'I ain't nobodies' ho':
Discourse, Stigma, and Identity Construction in the Sex Work Community

by

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Approved March 2013 by the
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ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

May 2013

ABSTRACT

This study is based on 31 interviews conducted in 2012 with male, female, and transgender sex workers at the St. James Infirmary, a full-spectrum health clinic run by sex workers for sex workers, located in San Francisco, California. My primary goals were, first, to document the lived realities of a diverse range of sex workers who live and work in the San Francisco Bay Area, and, second, to understand the impact of sex work discourse on the facilitation of stigma toward the sex work community and, finally, how that stigma influences the sex worker group identity and individual identity constructions. My primary findings indicate that although sex work discourse has traditionally been constructed within the dominant public sphere and not by sex workers themselves, this discourse has a profound effect on creating and perpetuating the stigma associated with sex work. In turn, this stigma affects both how the group and how individuals construct their identities, often negatively. Alternatively, a benefit of stigma is that it can induce the production of counterpublics which facilitate the emergence of new discourse. However, for this new discourse to gain acceptance into the public sphere, activist organizations must utilize traditional (and sometimes unintentionally marginalizing) strategies that can impact both the identity construction of the group and of individuals within the group. Understanding these complex relationships is therefore essential to understanding how activist organizations, such as the St. James Infirmary, situate themselves within the larger dominant public sphere, their impact on sex work discourse, and their impact on individual sex worker identity construction.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study was supported by a research grant from the Arizona State University Graduate & Professional Student Association. This dissertation was completed with support from the American Association of University Women. I would like to thank my Doctoral committee co-chairs, Dr. Karen Adams and Dr. Yasmina Katsulis, for their support and encouragement both personally and professionally. To Yasmina, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude for being first my professor, then mentor, and now friend. I could not have navigated this process without your constant encouragement. I would also like to express my indebtedness to my committee member, Dr. Madelaine Adelman, for her keen and critical feedback throughout the writing process. I'm deeply grateful to all of my friends and colleagues who have supported my interest in this research and encouraged me through the most challenging moments. Of course, I'd like to thank my family for their support, especially my husband, Colin, whose levity kept me grounded and whose love and encouragement kept me buoyed. Finally, this project would not have been possible without the help and support of the St. James Infirmary based in San Francisco and its Executive Director, Naomi Akers. It is also with deep gratitude that I thank each of the individuals who shared their lives and their stories with me, so openly, so candidly, and with such trust. It is with every intention that I hope to represent your voices truthfully.

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INTRODUCTION

I love sex work. I absolutely love it. Even when I get old, I'm gonna do granny porn.¹

It's kind of a shame thing within myself because I enjoy [sex work]. I'm not ashamed of it. I mean, I'm not proud of doing it, like I don't go around with business cards and stuff, you know. But at the same token, it's like you're embarrassed. You don't want your grandmother to know.²

Sex work? I hate it.³

Read together, these three quotes raise a host of questions regarding the complex and paradoxical coexistence of such conflicting feelings toward the same labor: sex work. For example, why do some sex workers feel more positively or negatively toward their labor than others? What factors contribute to feelings of positivity, ambivalence, or negativity? Such contradictions contribute to this study's central questions about how various sex work discourse emerges and circulates, how that discourse constructs and perpetuates stigma, how that stigma affects sex worker identity construction, and what strategies sex workers employ to manage their stigmatized labor and the identity affixed to it.

This study is based on 31 interviews conducted in 2012 with male, female, and transgender sex workers at the St. James Infirmary,⁴ “the only full-spectrum health clinic run by sex workers for sex workers” (Akers & Evans, 2010, p. 7), located in San Francisco, California. My primary goals were, first, to document the lived realities of a diverse range of sex workers who live and work in the San Francisco Bay Area, and,

¹ Tracy (27, Caucasian, female, sexually queer). All names have been changed.

² Zeak (35, Caucasian, male, gay).

³ Talio (51, biracial, male but wishes to be female, bisexual).

⁴ I will be using transgender as an adjective throughout this study. It should be noted that some interviewees use transgender as a noun which indicates the importance of self-naming along with the potential for variation of language by region, age, class, etc.

second, to understand the impact of sex work discourse on the facilitation of stigma around and within the sex work community and, finally, how that stigma influences the sex worker group identity and individual identity constructions.

Discourse refers to language, conversation, signs and signifiers that communicate a message to others. Discourses “are oriented towards action, aimed at establishing a particular prevailing view or social reality. Discourses govern what it is possible to think” (Singer & Hunter, 1999, p. 66). Because of this, the creation of prevailing discourses (e.g., by access to the public sphere), the circulation of discourses and the knowledge-production to which they contribute, create structures of power. These structures of power exist all around us and affect our lives in both overt and covert ways: “In the end, we are judged, condemned, classified, determined in our undertakings, destined to a certain mode of living or dying as a function of the true discourses which are the bearers of the specific effects of power” (Foucault, 1980, p. 1060).

Sex work discourse is steeped in a long, complex, and highly gendered history. Perhaps “[t]he real mission of the nation has historically been, and remains, a heterosexual mission in which national interests depend on conventional coupling and reproduction among its citizens” (Kitch, 2009, p. 168). Therefore, the emergence of any discourse counter to this mission is a threat to the nation-state and has typically been excluded from the public sphere. Arguably, this is why, historically, sex work discourse established prostitution as a female occupation in service to male clientele. This led, in part, to classifying female prostitutes as vectors of disease, erasing male and transgender prostitution all together, and stigmatizing and criminalizing sex workers throughout many parts of the world. These pervasive ideas still influence contemporary literature about sex

work and are emphasized in the radical feminist discourse around prostitution, which gained momentum in the 1980s and continues to develop an anti-trafficking discourse that engages an international audience. The radical feminist discourse aligns well with the traditional gendered discourse in the public sphere: women are perpetual victims of male domination. This is a much easier argument for the mass media to adopt because it aligns so well with our gendered history.

Much of the feminist debate around sex work revolves around the question of whether it constitutes a form of involuntary sexual objectification [radical feminist perspective] or voluntary sexual labor [liberal feminist perspective] (Koken, 2011, p. 210), but it is clear that both the radical and liberal feminist sex work discourses that have emerged are problematic and inadequate. Each stance is predicated on a male/female gender binary that constructs the female as the sexual service provider and the male as client. As a researcher and scholar, I align myself more with the liberal feminist attitude toward sex work which supports that sex work can be a consensual contract between two consenting adults, that decriminalization would benefit sex workers and improve the safety of their working conditions, and that often people enter the sex work industry due to a lack of economic alternatives. However, this study aims to push the liberal feminist perspective forward by addressing male and transgender sex workers and acknowledging that vulnerability and harm co-exist with autonomy and agency in sex work.

Very recent scholarship has begun to highlight more complex and diversified experiences within sex work as it is performed by a multitude of actors for a variety of reasons (Agustín, 1988; Katsulis, 2009). “This literature has done much to expose and challenge the entrenched polarities – such as those between oppression and liberation,

violence and pleasure, and victimhood and agency – that have long underpinned political and philosophical debates surrounding the sale and purchase of sex” (Smith & Laing, 2012, p. 517). However, in studies about commercial sex, the overwhelming majority continues to focus on female sexual providers with male clients.⁵ And still, the overwhelming majority of research (and research funding) emphasizes HIV/AIDS and STI transmission. While there is some focus on male sex workers who provide services for male clients (Aggleton, 1999; Kaye, 2007; Morrison & Whitehead, 2007; Scott et al., 2005), the transgender and queer sex work community remains largely ignored.

Further exploring the male, queer and transgender sex work community can begin to push the dialogue forward to create a more nuanced understanding of sex work beyond the historical (yet resonate) dichotomies. Melissa Hope Ditmore, Antonia Levy, and Alys Willman (2010) ask: “What do most of us really know about sex work?” They continue, “The media report regularly on the most sensational aspects of the sex industry: the rise of illegal trafficking networks, the looming threat of HIV/AIDS from a booming underground sex trade, and of course, the occasional politician caught with his pants down” (p. 1). Indeed, what do most of us *really* know about sex work? Particularly sex work that falls outside of the dominant discourse that has been established both within the public sphere and feminist counterpublic?

Therefore, in this study, I include female, male and transgender sex workers to acknowledge a reality beyond a gender binary that includes multiple masculinities and femininities. Doing so also highlights that males (or those presenting as males) do not alone perpetrate violence, do not alone enjoy erotic sex, do not alone perpetuate stigma,

⁵ For an excellent exception, see the September, 2012 *Sexualities*, 15(5/6) journal which aims to address exactly this absence.

and do not alone hold power, complicating some radical and liberal feminists' arguments about sex work.

In Chapter 1, public sphere theory frames the literature review which accounts for how the literature being reviewed has come to freely circulate. Utilizing a public sphere theory framework also explores why sex work literature has, at different historical times, focused on specific elements of sex work, sex workers, and sexuality while allowing me to simultaneously interrogate who has had the access and opportunity to construct such narratives. In this chapter, I explore the complex tensions between medical, religious and legal ideologies, social and economic conditions, and access to power that have influenced (and continue to influence) our conceptions of both sex work and sexuality and the public discourse around them. This chapter examines how exclusion from the contemporary mainstream public sphere allows for misrepresentations of marginalized communities, specifically sex workers, and how those marginalized voices create counterpublics in an effort to generate a space for their own discourse and identity constructions.

In Chapter 2, I discuss the theories and methods used in this study. Utilizing intersectional theory, allows for the intersectional paradigm that views race, class, gender, and many other categories of identity as mutually constructive systems of power that cannot be teased apart from each other. Therefore, throughout my analysis, I emphasize multiple axes of identity that include gender, sexuality, race, and class. Moving these to the center of my analysis highlight their interactions within the sex work community and reveal how these interacting systems influence identity-construction. Additionally, I use grounded theory, a qualitative method, which allows more freedom to

gain insight into the lived experience of the subject, and of sex work specifically, because I am aiming to approach sex work and the sex workers' experiences without any pre-conceived theoretical underpinnings.

Chapter 3 examines the history of sex work in San Francisco beginning with the gold rush and explores how the highly raced, classed, and gendered laws surrounding prostitution changed over the course of 160 years. This chapter also examines the history and interconnectedness of prostitution and the public emergence of “non-normative” sexualities within San Francisco. Finally, this chapter discusses the social climate, culture, and demographics of San Francisco today. This analysis situates San Francisco within the larger history of sex work and sexuality discourse discussed in previous chapters. This chapter also argues that while some aspects of prostitution in San Francisco paralleled that of other major cities, San Francisco's distinct history, geography, and demographics have created a particularly unique climate for the emergence of a sex work counterpublic that greatly inform the results of this study.

In Chapter 4, I use Erving Goffman's (1963) theories on stigma as a launching point for understanding the social process of stigmatization. I argue that sex workers as a whole suffer from a specific kind of stigma but that multiple stigmas can disparately impact sex workers, and that whether it is criminalizing public policy or pathologic public representations, sex workers are often constructed as deviant criminals deserving of maltreatment. This chapter aims to push the discussion of sex work stigma further by exploring criminalizing and cultural stigmas around sex work, stigma within the sex work community, including the “whore stigma” that many sex workers face, and some of the strategies that sex workers practice to cope with these stigmas.

Finally, Chapter 5 explores how an individual's self-concept is closely linked to multiple axes of identity, including gender, race/ethnicity, sexuality, and collective group identification. Utilizing a range of research that asserts social identity as part of an individual's self-concept, derived from membership to a collective social group, I examine the effects of having a stigmatized occupational group identity (i.e., sex work). My study reveals that when one's occupation is highly stigmatized, an individual must employ strategies to construct a positive self-concept in the face of a negative social group identity. This chapter explores who, in the sex work community, has more or less access to those strategies, why, and how this ultimately affects an individual's self-concept.

My primary findings indicate that although sex work discourse has traditionally been constructed within the dominant public sphere and not by sex workers themselves, this discourse has a profound effect on creating and perpetuating the stigma associated with sex work. In turn, this stigma affects both how the group and how individuals construct their identities, often negatively. Alternatively, a benefit of stigma is that it can induce the production of counterpublics which facilitate the emergence of new discourse. However, for this new discourse to gain acceptance into the public sphere, activist organizations, such as the San Francisco St. James Infirmary, must utilize traditional (and sometimes unintentionally marginalizing) strategies that can impact both the identity construction of the group and of individuals within the group. Understanding these complex relationships is therefore essential to understanding how activist organizations, such as the St. James Infirmary, situate themselves within the larger dominant public

sphere, their impact on sex work discourse, and their impact on individual sex worker identity construction.

It is important for me to make explicitly clear that I understand that there are men, women, transgender people, and children who are forced or coerced to perform sex work, encounter violence as part of their sex work occupation, or perform sex work for survival. I understand that in many cases, both historically and presently, sex work has been a response to poverty or to limited economic access. Sexual services operate as a tradable commodity within various configurations of power, and this implies that there is an increase in the vulnerable groups involved in these transactions where the client and service provider enter into an economically unequal relationship. As the opening quotes suggest, my study reveals a number of participants who feel positive and empowered by sex work, a number of participants who consistently or even occasionally feel ambivalent, feel coerced and forced into sex work, and a number of participants who feel negatively toward sex work and whose sexual boundaries shifted with their economic needs. This is precisely why this study is so important: to understand the complexity of knowledge-production while simultaneously proving the material consequences of such discourse and the influence on both group and individual identity constructions, which are key components to sex workers' emotional and psychological well-being.

Chapter 1

PUBLICS, COUNTERPUBLICS, AND SEX WORK: A LITERATURE REVIEW

*Prostitution leaves women and children physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually devastated. Recovery takes years, even decades—often, the damage can never be undone.*⁶

*Prostitution as an extension of the right of consenting adults to perform whatever sexual acts they wish.*⁷

The quotes above indicate the two prevailing discourses about sex work that often operate in direct opposition to each other.⁸ The first, representing the radical feminist perspective, asserts that prostitution is inherently victimizing to women and children. The second, representing the liberal feminist perspective, suggests that the individual rights of prostitutes should be protected from government invention. Both views exemplify the predominant sex work discourse that presently circulates within the public sphere.

This chapter examines the evolutions of the “sex work as oppression” model, touted by radical feminists, and “sex workers’ rights” model, touted by liberal feminists, as both highly gendered and raced social constructions. This chapter also explores how they emerge as public discourse in opposition to one another. Utilizing public sphere theory to explore the complex tensions between medical, religious and legal ideologies,

⁶ U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, “The Link between Prostitution and Sex Trafficking” (2004).

⁷ McElroy, 2010, para. 6.

⁸ In sex work research, there is a long-standing debate about utilizing terminology such as “sex work” versus “prostitution” (which will be discussed in this chapter). I use “sex work” to emphasize the labor-aspect of commercial sex and to serve as a political stance that emphasizes sexual service providers’ rights to safe labor practices. I find “sex worker” to be a less pejorative and gendered term. Additionally, “sex worker” encompasses a wide variety of sexual service provisions including, though not limited to: exchanging sexual acts for money or survival; exotic dancing; participating in pornography; phone sex; etc. It should be noted that many people who participate in these occupations do not identify as “sex workers” which will be explored in later chapters. Throughout this study, however, I will use “prostitute” or “prostitution” when other authors use it or in the historical chapters simply because “[m]any words have been coined as synonyms for prostitute, but in fact prostitute is the only word that in the nineteenth century referred to any woman who offered her body for hire or who sold sexual acts for ‘base gain’” (Barnhart, 1986, p. x).

social and economic conditions, and access to power that have influenced (and continue to influence) our conceptions of both sex work and sexuality and the public discourses around them, this chapter examines how exclusion from the contemporary mainstream public sphere allows for misrepresentations of marginalized communities, specifically sex workers, and how those marginalized voices create counterpublics in an effort to generate a space for their own discourse and identity constructions.

THE PUBLIC SPHERE

The “public sphere” is a popular concept among sociologists and rhetoricians defined as “a discursive space in which individuals and groups congregate to discuss matters of mutual interest and, where possible, to reach a common judgment. Public spheres are discursive sites where society deliberates about normative standards and even develops new frameworks for expressing and evaluating social reality” (Hauser, 1998, p. 86). The concept of a public sphere is important when analyzing discourse because it allows us to trace who has traditionally had access to the public sphere and how that has shaped and perpetuated the circulation of specific discourse—particularly discourses about those without access to the public sphere due to occupation, gender, race, or economic status.

In Jürgen Habermas’ (1962) *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, a work that is considered the foundation for understanding the contemporary public sphere, Habermas traces the history of the public, beginning in ancient Greece. Habermas’ notion of the “bourgeois public sphere” extends from the seventeenth through mid-twentieth centuries, and “[i]t is the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, hence an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction” (Fraser, 1990,

p. 110). To clarify, though Habermas suggests that the public sphere is in some ways a spatial concept, it is not linked to any specific public space.⁹ He suggests that the public sphere has developed in spaces such as coffee houses, salons, streets, and even newspapers, but this notion of “space” is further complicated by technologies like the internet and the concept of globalization.

While Habermas’ notion of the emergence of the public sphere is heralded as the basis of our own contemporary public, he is often critiqued for not acknowledging members of the community who did not meet the “bourgeois” standards of land ownership and literacy (and who were thusly not allowed to engage in the rational-critical debate of the public). However, according to Craig Calhoun (1992), it is important to note that “Habermas does not mean to suggest that what made the public sphere bourgeois was simply the class composition of its members. Rather, it was *society* that was bourgeois and bourgeois society produced a certain form of public sphere” (p. 7). Calhoun’s point is important because while the public of the late eighteenth century was inclusive in principle, that is, it would include anyone who was literate and property owning to debate matters of public importance, it was not inclusive in practice. Habermas tries to insist that “[h]owever exclusive the public might be in any given instance, it could never close itself off entirely and become consolidated as a clique; for it always understood and found itself immersed within a more inclusive public of all private

⁹ It has become common practice to think of the social world divided into two gendered and raced spheres: the private and public. The private sphere is the stereotypically feminine world of household, family, and unpaid domestic labor while the public sphere is the stereotypically masculine world of politics and paid employment. When (and where) the private/public intersects are often areas of discord (Arendt, 1998). Habermas’ conception of the private sphere was very different: he discusses the private sphere as connected to the public sphere only because the public sphere began with private economies that had to be recognized.

people, persons who—insofar as they were propertied and educated—as readers, listeners, and spectators could avail themselves via the market of the objects that were subject to discussion” (Habermas, 1962, p. 37, my emphasis). While Habermas defended the public sphere as an inclusive space for rational-critical debate, it was in fact exclusive to educated men who were wealthy enough to own property and circulate freely in public spaces.¹⁰ Our own contemporary public has a similarly flawed egalitarian (mis)conception of the accessibility of the contemporary public sphere.

As Nancy Fraser (1990) suggests, Habermas idealizes a utopian public with a “masculinist ideological notion that functioned to legitimate an emergent form of class rule” (p. 116). Thus, while the public sphere may have seemed inclusive in principle, it was exclusive to those who functioned as “other” and who did not “legitimately” represent themselves within the public, according to Habermasian standards of representation.¹¹ This group would include members of the community who were not wealthy, educated, white men, and certainly included prostitutes.

THE PUBLIC AND DISCIPLINING THE BODY

Foucault’s (1975) *Discipline and Punish* argues that torture and discipline reflected a public display of power on the body of subjects in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a time period that was also the height of Jürgen Habermas’ “bourgeois public sphere,” where our own contemporary mainstream public is deeply rooted. Foucault addresses, though Habermas does not, the real, lived, and physical

¹⁰ The subtext of white supremacy was embodied in the notion of the public sphere from its conception. Contemporary racism in the public sphere is discussed at length later in this chapter.

¹¹ I am using “other” or “othering” here as a general term utilized in the social sciences to understand the processes by which societies and groups exclude “others” who they want to subordinate or who do not fit into their society (Marshall, Douglas, & McDonnell, 2007, p. 65).

consequences of being marginalized from the loci of power; during this time period that powerful force was the bourgeois public sphere, and the genesis of “prostitute as vector of disease” emerged during this period. For example, in 1798, with a fear of the French army being incapacitated by venereal diseases during the French Revolution, two private physicians were asked to examine Parisian prostitutes and to report cases of infection to the police. In 1802, a dispensary was established, and the police began registering all public prostitutes who were then required to submit to semiweekly examinations (Bullough, 1964, p. 165-166). The prostitutes had to consent to the exams which were likened to “surgical rape,”¹² because as economically deprived and morally maligned women, they had no power against the controlling institutions that ordered the exams: “Power-knowledge is exercised over individuals through controlling institutions: schools, asylums, reformatories, penitentiaries, prisons, and armies. This power is carried out through interlinked ‘regimes of practices’ known as punishment, medicine, education, protection, and so on. Discourses, practices and acts are inseparable” (Agustín, 1988, p. 98). Parisian prostitutes were discursively constructed as vectors of disease and subject to compulsory medical examinations which is but one example of the lived, material consequences of being a marginalized group with no representation within the public sphere.

Yet, what was happening to prostitutes in France was not happening in a vacuum.

Between 1830 and 1860 nearly 700 American medical students went to Paris to study

¹² This quote is from Josephine Butler (1828-1906), a Christian feminist who led the movement to repeal the Contagious Disease Act on the grounds that it created an unfair double standard between men and women. She is a controversial historical figure in that some feminists argue that as a member of the growing middle-class, she saw herself as suitable to help, control, advise, and discipline the unruly poor, including their sexual conduct. For more on Butler, see Walkowitz, 1980.

medicine, in part because in France they would be able to examine men *and* women, something that colonial Protestant values in the United States did not allow. The majority of the doctors who traveled to Paris to study medicine were from wealthy and influential American families, thus they were leaders in the medical field and many became teachers upon their return to the United States (McCullough, 2011, p. 115-123). As members of controlling institutions (schools and hospitals), they would adopt and perpetuate the discursive framework of the “prostitute as vector of disease” in America.

During this same time in history, the earliest social studies on prostitution in the nineteenth century in Western Europe and the United States emerged. Kempadoo (2009) states that “[t]hese studies rested heavily upon longer-standing patriarchal and Christian discourses of sex and gender, and the work by Parent-Duchalet (1836), Paul Lacroix (1851) and William Acton (1858) became the cornerstones for social and scientific understandings of prostitution” (p. 255). The studies concluded that prostitution was a universal phenomenon and pointed to “an inherently promiscuous male nature, an inalienable masculine right to regular heterosexual intercourse, and women’s innate disposition toward licentiousness” (ibid.).¹³ From these studies developed a clear double-standard where seeking sex from a prostitute was perceived as a male right but the female prostitutes “were identified as social deviants who were to be carefully monitored and regulated in order that they did not disrupt public morality and health” (Kempadoo, 2009, p. 256). Thus, while the female prostitute had access to public spaces in ways that other women of this time period did not, those spaces were eventually zoned off to become red-

¹³ Parent-Duchalet (1836) observes: “The profession of prostitution is an evil of all times and of all countries and appears to be innate in the social structure of mankind. It will perhaps never be entirely eradicated; still all the more must we strive to limit its extent and its dangers” (qtd. in Clarkson, 1939).

light districts which facilitated both the surveillance and the discipline of the deviant prostitute while keeping them separate from “respectable” bourgeois women, both in Europe and in the United States.

This notion of the deviant female, specifically if she was poor, was also prevalent in the United States before the 1850s and is evidenced by ante-bellum rape trials in which white women’s accusations of rape against a Black slave did not hold up in court, particularly if the slave accused was a productive worker, and the woman was a member of the working class. Importantly, “such judgments reflected lingering suspicions about the chastity of lower-class white women” (Kitch, 2009, p. 86; Hodes, 1999). During this time, in cities like New York and San Francisco, prostitution was becoming more visible as prostitutes worked in public spaces like theaters and gambling houses, but they were often viewed as deviant women of a lower-class that threatened bourgeois respectability and Christian morality. Although prostitutes had access to certain public spaces, they were *not* members of the public sphere, and they functioned in direct opposition to “good” women.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century, bourgeois ideals held fast, and “[p]rostitutes were analyzed and categorized in relation to the bourgeois female ideals: the good wife and the virginal daughter” (Bell, 1994, p. 40). This “othering” was an important and implicit component of the public sphere model and resonates in today’s contemporary public sphere because “where societal inequality persists, deliberative processes in public spheres will tend to operate to the advantage of the dominant groups and to the disadvantages of subordinates” (Fraser, 1990, p. 122-123). As Fraser notes, the public sphere has a tradition of exclusion.

Throughout Europe and in America, the mid-to-late-nineteenth century witnessed a shift in the criminalization of sexual “deviancy” as sexual behavior came under increasing state scrutiny. Because marriage was discouraged to men in the British military and because homosexual behavior¹⁴ was illegal in both Britain and the United States, prostitution was seen as a necessity that would require heavy regulation. During this time, many of the sex and vice codes that are still prevalent in Western societies emerged. Most controversially, “[i]n England, a series of Contagious Disease Acts passed from 1864 on to control venereal disease in the army and navy by registering prostitutes [and] had the effect of stigmatizing the women and isolating them from the working-class neighborhoods in which they lived and worked” (Ross & Rapp, 1983, p. 62). Men who sought the company of prostitutes were never tested for diseases and when it was recommended that sailors and soldiers be held to compulsory testing, physicians balked. Surgeon Perry of the Royal Artillery complained that he felt degraded by examining men for venereal diseases and told the Skey Committee, a committee charged with making improvements to the Contagious Disease Act, that he felt it placed him “in an utterly false position as a gentleman and as a medical man” (qtd. in MacHugh, 1980, p. 39). Such feelings bolstered the notion that prostitutes were pathologic and ignored the possibility of military men engaging in sexual behavior with each other.

WOMEN ENTER THE PUBLIC SPHERE

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas (1962) does not address gender, a critique that feminists have observed (Landes, 1988; Fraser, 1990). Yet,

¹⁴ The actual term “homosexual” and “homosexuality” emerged in 1897 in Havlock Ellis and John Addington Symonds’ book *Sexual Inversion*. The contemporary notion of homosexual or gay identity had not yet been formed; rather, scrutiny focused on sexual behavior.

the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century provided important social and economic shifts that allowed the emergence of wealthy, white women to begin limited participation in both public spaces and the public sphere, specifically by moral crusading.

One of these crusades was a campaign to repeal the Contagious Disease Acts, led by Josephine Butler. The campaign, which rightfully argued that the Acts were sexist and harmful, was ultimately successful, but the Contagious Disease Acts were harbingers of further sexually restrictive legislation. The Criminal Law Amendment Act, passed in 1885, raised the age of consent for girls from thirteen to sixteen in response to a movement to “save” working-class girls from the perceived evils of “white-slavery” and aristocratic male lust, (Ross & Rapp, 1983, p. 62), ultimately framing girls as sexually irresistible victims of men’s uncontrollable (but natural) sex drive.

This moral crusading and the rescue industry that it produced was, and some argue still is, embraced by white, middle class women (Agustín, 1988; Mohanty, 2003). It offered them opportunities to right a perceived wrong, enter the public sphere, and save victims of prostitution, often leading prostitutes to repentance and religion. Yet, it was also a unique opportunity for employment for these bourgeois women: “These were respectable, paid occupations, something that had not existed before. There was now employment for women in charitable, educational and correctional institutions” (Agustín, 1988, p. 121). Thus white, wealthy, heterosexual women were able to fulfill their Christian obligations, operate within the public sphere, and make an income that then further perpetuated their status as part of the bourgeois.

Agustín (1988) argues, “[b]y the end of nineteenth century, the image of the ‘prostitute’ as vile and disgusting had been replaced by the figure of the victim, an

ordinary working-class woman who needed rescuing” (p. 128). This regulatory approach “remained central to colonial regulations of sex and sexuality and informed state policies in various places around the world, as well as continuing within the context of studies of crime in Western European societies” (Kempadoo, 2009, p. 256). Additionally, the regulatory approach focused on female pathology and public health. Soon, however, the abolitionist perspective gained prominence during the latter part of the nineteenth century, drawing on Christianity, the politics of anti-slavery, and the emergence of the women’s suffrage movement. The abolitionist perspective flourished “within the context of the institutionalization of the nuclear, heterosexual family, [and] notions of sex as a biological duty for reproductive purposes” (Kempadoo, 2009, p. 257).

At the turn of the twentieth century, Habermas (1962) argues that the bourgeois public sphere begins to erode because of economic and structural changes (p. 175). Urbanization and technology (such as the typewriter and telephone) afforded women additional opportunities to work outside of the home and support themselves, moving from the private/domestic sphere where their reproductive labor was unpaid, to the public sphere where their labor was now paid. This produced an anxiety among rural conservatives about the morality of young women who began dating and were now exposed to the vice and red light districts within the cities. As more and more women traveled into the cities, a moral panic developed that was heightened by reports of women being drugged, kidnapped, and forced into prostitution.

While prostitution had more or less been a legal nuisance that was tolerated within major city centers, the hysteria around prostitution and trafficking caused many cities to begin outlawing prostitution and developing other legislation to “protect”

women. The White-Slave Traffic Act, or the Mann Act (1910), was a response to the growing moral panic and acted as a federal white-slave statute that prohibited the transportation of women and minors across state lines for prostitution (Langum, 1994). Unfortunately, such legislation was designed to punish anyone who “trafficked” a woman or a minor¹⁵ across state lines, which mitigated the trafficked person’s agency and discursively constructed them as a victim of the trafficker or pimp. Additionally, the Mann Act utilized language that included to “transport or cause to be transported, or aid or assist in obtaining transportation for” or to “persuade, induce, entice, or coerce” a woman to travel “in interstate or foreign commerce, or in any Territory or the District of Columbia” if the travel was “for the purpose of prostitution or debauchery, or for any other immoral purpose ... whether with or without her consent.” Specifically, “for any other immoral purpose” was vague, problematic language which led to prosecutions for homosexuality, interracial relationships, and unmarried couples living together (Connelly, 1980; Langum, 1994). This meant that these Acts could be used as tools to prosecute “deviant” sexuality and further the religious and bourgeois agenda.

RACISM AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Exclusion from the public sphere was raced as much as it was (initially) gendered. In the United States, from the 1890s through the 1930s and beyond, racial tensions had escalated to the point that juries in rape cases were allowed to assume that all black men desired to rape white women and no white woman would consent to sex with a black man:

A white woman was presumed virtuous unless proven otherwise. By then, even

¹⁵ In 1978, as a response to an increase in juvenile gay male prostitution the language of The Mann Act was amended to be gender neutral for juveniles. In 1986, the entire Act was amended to be gender neutral.

white prostitutes benefited, as their sexual backgrounds could be ruled out of order if the accused man were black, as in a 1912 case in Alabama (*Story v. State*): ‘The consensus of public opinion, unrestricted to either race, is that a white woman prostitute is yet, though lost of virtue, above the even greater sacrifice of the voluntary submission of her person to the embraces of the other race’ (Kitch, 2009, p. 97).

As this example indicates, white women’s virtue became a given, even for prostitutes, and trumped the perceived sexual pathology of black men. Starting in the late nineteenth century, with the growth of sexology, non-white bodies began to be “scientifically” associated with sexual pathology, and so-called “sexual inversion” gained credibility when studies began appearing in medical journals in the 1880s and 1890s. During this time, “eugenic sexologists like Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis were emphasizing the physiological differences among “sexual inverters”¹⁶ and linking racialized bodies with sexual ‘abnormalities’” (Kitch, 2009, p. 101-02). This sexual “othering” of certain bodies implicated them as sexually deviant, insatiable, and exotic, stereotypes that in many ways simply scientifically confirmed the longer history of subordination of specific groups. There are a number of accounts of how bodily classifications connected to moral evaluations of women, the working-class, national and minority ethnic groups, such as the Irish, Asians, Africans and African-Caribbeans, people with disabilities, Roma (i.e., gypsies), and gay men, who were all positioned against the normative image of white European, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied male (Paterson, 1998), who was, after all, discursively constructing these “others.” The

¹⁶ “Sexual inversion” referred to a broad range of “deviant” gender behavior, for example, homosexual desire (Chauncey Jr., 1983, p. 116).

consequences of this scientific “othering” would include the perpetuation of a number of highly stigmatized and sexualized stereotypes that would continue to impact the discourse around women, minorities, and “non-normative” sexualities indefinitely.

TURN OF THE CENTURY & THE RISE OF MASS MEDIA

At the turn of the century, due in part to Progressivism, women’s suffrage and modernization, Americans began experiencing important social shifts. Notably, in “[t]he first two decades of the [twentieth] century, large numbers of middle-class people began to take up new attitudes and adopt new practices in the areas of family and sexual morality” (Epstein, 1983, p. 125). The notion of female (hetero)sexual pleasure began to gain popularity as it was espoused through the media.¹⁷ “Any woman who read the popular woman’s magazines or went to the movies in the 1920s had to be aware that sex, romance, and companionship were considered important to a successful marriage” (ibid., p. 126). Yet, contraceptives were accessed only under a physician’s care, so while middle-class women could access them, and the subsequent control over their reproductive bodies empowered them, working-class women and minority or immigrant women, some of whom were prostitutes, did not have the option. Access to contraception in many ways changed the definition of marriage and family and Epstein (1983) argues that the new emphasis on marital intimacy carried with it an added strain to many

¹⁷ Habermas makes the distinction between the “early press” which he claims highlighted political controversy, benefitting the public sphere (the first structural transformation) and the “new media” which he claims commodified the news (the second structural transformation). This commodification, he argues, weakens the public sphere. His critical view of the new media asserts that in a “post-industrial, capitalist mass democracy, the public and private domains interlock leading to a refeudalization of the public sphere” (Habermas, 1962, p. 97). Habermas was very critical of the mass media and stressed that “the asymmetrical nature of mass culture, which makes it easier for those with capital or power to distribute their views but harder for marginal voices to talk back” (Warner, 2005, p. 49). Yet, the mass media has become precisely the tool that many marginalized voices have used to gain a presence in the public sphere, which will be discussed in later chapters.

couples. Yet, perhaps due to the absence of a feminist movement, women were not yet able to raise this as a public issue (p. 127). Though white, middle-class women had made some headway toward engaging in the public sphere, mostly through temperance and social movements, ultimately, it would be their entry into the labor force during World War II and after that shifted gender roles and the division of labor so dramatically that women began to have more access to public space and a greater voice in the public sphere.

The end of World War II brought about significant social changes in Europe as an attempt to prepare the nations “for the great new age that was about to commence” (Evans, 1979, p. 210). Specifically, this meant that France abolished brothels on April 24, 1946 due in part to the reforms of Marthe Richard, and “the prostitute was liberated as France herself had been liberated” (ibid.). The result of this was that the female prostitutes who formerly worked in brothels moved to the streets, hotels, and apartments, and France lost the ability to tax the working women. No longer subject to health screenings, venereal diseases among prostitutes increased (ibid.).

Tighter controls over prostitution emerged in Britain, in 1959. The Street Offences Act, made soliciting and loitering for the purpose of prostitution punishable and penalties increased for procuring and managing a brothel or “pimping,” both of which were illegal. Prostitution itself remained legal (Evans, 1979, p. 215). The result of the Act was that prostitution became clandestine and “the prostitute was vulnerable as never before to the greed of gangsters, blackmailers, extortionate landlords and other predators. It became all the more necessary to obtain the backing of a pimp or the protection of an organization” (ibid.).

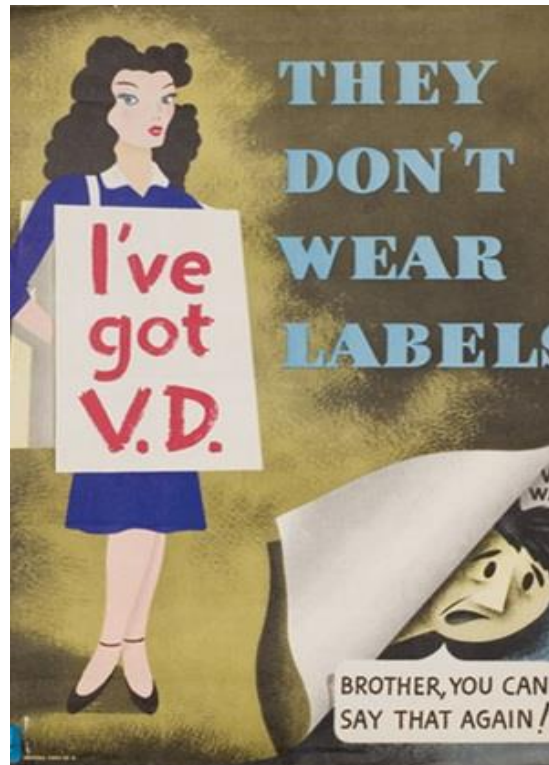


Figure 1 & 2: Examples of two posters that warned enlisted men of the dangers of unprotected sex with prostitutes were part of a larger educational campaign to stem the spread of sexually transmitted diseases during and after World War II. The posters, which were prominently displayed at military bases, were intended as reminders that would buttress messages imparted through filmstrips and lectures. The messages took different approaches, some warning against prostitution and cautioning, “They don’t wear labels.” Images courtesy of Yale School of Medicine, 2009.

America, after an aggressive campaign that perpetuated prostitutes as vectors of disease, brothels were outlawed after World War II. One former Seattle brothel proprietor lamented, “Just before World War II there were more than a hundred houses. Now I doubt there’s one” (qtd. in Evans, 1979, p. 224). Only one state, Nevada, eventually legalized brothels in 1971 under Nevada Revised Statute 224.245, which legalized “dancing halls, escort services, entertainment by referral services and gambling games or devices [with] limitations on licensing of houses of prostitution” (Nevada Revised Statutes, 2009). It was not until 1980 that the Supreme Court ruled that counties with less

than 400,000 people could regulate and license brothels, and in 1987 the Nevada Revised Statutes made non-brothel prostitution explicitly illegal.¹⁸ This ruling discursively created a sanctioned public space for the performance of commodified heterosexual encounters, where women became active agents involved in legitimate (though stigmatized) occupational roles as prostitutes. Yet, overwhelmingly, following World War II and into the middle of the twentieth century, Western countries shifted their laws around prostitution to make it illegal in an unsuccessful attempt to abolish it. Many of these movements coincided with medical campaigns warning men about the dangers of prostitutes to their health, and these messages were circulated through the mass media.

The mass media was the second structural transformation of the public sphere, according to Habermas, who critically argued that the mass media tainted the public sphere. While the public sphere was once a place for rational-critical debate, mass media produced a “public that is appealed to not for criticism but for benign acclamation” (Warner, 2005, p. 50). The mass media has changed dramatically within the last sixty years, and the development of the internet raises additional questions about transnationalism, globalization, and the public sphere itself. This creates “conflicting trends of an ever higher capitalization of media, which are increasingly controlled by a small number of transnational companies and the apparent decentralization of new media” (ibid., p. 51). If we frame the internet as an emergent public sphere,¹⁹ it is more accessible to more diverse populations than the traditional public sphere. However, some

¹⁸ The statute declared: “In a county whose population is 400,000 or more, the license board shall not grant any license to a petitioner for the purposes of operating a house of ill fame or repute or any other business employing any person for the purposes of prostitution” (NRS 244.245). The population paragraph of this statute is important to note because in 1978 the Supreme Court ruled that because of the population paragraph, houses of prostitution could not be considered nuisances and therefore became legal.

¹⁹ For further discussion of this, see Papacharissi, 2002; Himmelboim, 2011.

aspects of the internet are highly controlled by various state-apparatuses, including libraries, police, hospitals, and the government, and the internet itself is still inaccessible to the most economically disadvantaged and marginalized groups. However, it is clear that the mass media is powerful in influencing the population and perpetuating discourses about specific populations, as seen with the circulation of radical and liberal feminist discourse regarding sex work.

TODAY: RADICAL AND LIBERAL FEMINIST DISCOURSE,

A COUNTERPUBLIC

As this chapter has established, because of the inherently exclusive nature of the classic and contemporary public spheres models, having a public voice with which to represent oneself became an obstacle for marginalized groups, including prostitutes. Fraser (1990) argues that “members of subordinated groups would have no arenas for deliberation among themselves about their needs, objectives, and strategies. They would have no venues in which to undertake communicative processes that were not...under the supervision of the dominant groups” (p. 123). A consequence of this was that misrepresentations of marginalized groups, prostitutes specifically, became universalized archetypes and caricatures that circulated without resistance. One misrepresentative example seen repeatedly was (and to some degree remains) the prostitute as a diseased, pathological, female victim in desperate need of rescue.

With so many individuals traditionally excluded from the public sphere, other publics emerged in resistance to that exclusion. These “counterpublics” and their participants were:

marked off from persons or citizens in general. Discussion within such a public is understood to contravene the rules obtaining in the world at large, being structured by alternative dispositions or protocols, making different assumptions about what can be said or what goes without saying. This kind of public is, in effect, a counterpublic: it maintains at some level, conscious or not, an awareness of its subordinate status... participation in such a public is one of the ways by which its members' identities are formed and transformed" (Warner, 2005, p. 56).

As this quote explains, counterpublics create a space for marginalized populations, such as ethnic or racial minority groups, gay men and women, the transgender community, and prostitutes, among others, to begin to generate discursive representations of themselves. Members of counterpublics understand their subordinate status in respect to the dominant culture because they are aware of the dominant discourse about them that is in circulation. However, being a member of a counterpublic allows them to construct a discourse that more accurately represents their lived realities and identities. For some prostitutes this meant a shift in the discourse to include the new term "sex worker."

For women specifically, in the 1960s and 1970s, "second-wave feminism provided a pivotal cultural position and mobilizing force as a central inspiration, strategic influence and defining metaphor for a wide range of new social movements" (Mac an Ghail & Haywood, 2007, p. 23). One of the important social movements that emerged during this time, due to increased research on sex work, was sex workers' rights. Suddenly, the archetype of prostitute was heavily and publicly debated and sex workers themselves were beginning to have a voice in the debates. Soon a counterpublic of two

specific camps emerged: radical feminists and liberal feminists.²⁰ Radical feminists argued that sex work was inherently exploitive to women and should be prohibited, believing that making sex work illegal would abolish it. Liberal feminists argued that sex work could be empowering, should be viewed as a form of labor, and often called for the decriminalization of sex work. Liberal feminists argued that the illegal status of sex work contributed to stigmatization, exploitation and abuse of sex workers. They believed that decriminalization would begin to reduce stigma and that removing the criminal status of sex workers could afford them labor protections.²¹ Each feminist camp discursively constructed sex work in a particularly gendered, classed, and raced way, and it is important to note that these two very different models represented the different experiences women had often based on their own access to power. Therefore, the sex workers' rights debate and movement was complemented by feminist critiques of patriarchy, capitalism, and racism, which created the foundation for the most recent debate on sex work, but in many ways, the activist movement remains shaped by those who have the education, time, national identity, language skills, and economic freedom to participate.

Radical feminists and prostitution

²⁰ There are many other feminist camps (e.g., Marxist) that take a stance on sex work. I explore the most broad, recognized and oppositional positions that have emerged in research on sex work characterized as the “anti-prostitution” stance (represented by radical feminists) and the “pro-sex work” stance (represented by liberal feminists) (Doezma, 2002) because they are most central to my argument about historical and emerging sex work discourse.

²¹ While many people, then and now, conflate decriminalization and legalization, there are important differences between them. Specifically, legalization means that sex workers would have to register as sex workers; they would be subject to state ordered medical testing; they would be taxed and regulated by the state. Decriminalization meant that sexual exchanges between consenting adults would no longer be criminalized.

Radical feminists emphasize that gender is the primary mechanism through which women and female sexuality are oppressed; therefore they also emphasize the gendered nature of the sex industry, citing prostitutes as strictly female and their clients as strictly male. Beginning in the 1960s, “[a] distinguishing feature of the radical feminist conception of human nature is its attention to human reproduction. . . . Radical feminists claim that the sexual division of labor established originally in procreation is extended into every area of life” (Jaggar, 1988, p. 249). Radical feminists take the stance that women perform the unpaid reproductive labor such as cleaning, cooking, childcare, and other “women’s work,” including sexual satisfaction of their (male) partners (Duffy, 2007), which, they argue, supports the heterosexual expectation of female sexual availability. There are multiple global examples of radical feminist academic discourses that frame sex workers monolithically as “female victims.” Catherine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin are perhaps the most famous radical feminists in the United States who frame sex work (specifically prostitution and pornography) as crimes against women’s civil rights. One main tenet of their argument is that prostitution is an example of the commodification of the female body and an illustration of gender hierarchy. For example, the radical feminists Carter and Giobbe (2006) argue that prostitution is sexual slavery and Carol Pateman (2006) states that the client “buys” the use of a woman’s body when he purchases a sexual service.

Radical feminists argue that prostitution is harmful to the prostitute, the client, and to society, citing evidence of coercion and subjugation in the sex industry to support their view that the industry is not legitimate. Radical feminists do not use the term “sex work,” but instead refer to prostitution, in its various forms, and frequently use terms like

“exploitation,” “slave,” and “survivor” (Spector, 2006, p. 5). For example, Kathleen Barry (1995), a radical feminist, argues:

Sexualization of society constructs femaleness as an ‘essence’ and as acquisition that is sex. As sexed body, woman is made universal, and women, accessible for sex, are made to be indistinguishable from each other...By contrast, men may need sex, they may pursue it, they get it, have it, and frequently misuse it, and sometimes they may even be used for it. But men are not objects of sexualization; neither as a collectivity nor in their individuality are they sex, sexed body. (p. 21-22)

In this quote, Barry summarizes a popular concept within the radical feminist camp that only women’s bodies can be “acquired” and only men can do the “acquiring,” arguing it is only women’s bodies that can be misused and that there are no circumstances within our culture where men are sexually objectified.

Out of such discourse, a caricature of “the prostitute” emerges as a victim of gendered sexual abuse, who is tricked into prostitution, and is in dire need of saving because “[o]nce begun, she couldn’t get away. Afterward, prostitution kept coming back to her” (Barry, 1995, p. 23).²² This example exemplifies the radical feminist perspective that women are victims of sexual exploitation and passive (i.e., non-agentive) actors in the sexual exchange that keeps happening to them or “coming back” to them. While this is true for some sex workers who are exploited or forced into sexual labor, the radical feminist perspective fails to acknowledge experiences outside of this paradigm.

²² For an expanded example of this caricature, see Barry, 1995, p. 22-23; Collins, 2011.

There are several critiques to the radical feminist perspective on prostitution. One critique is that using the term prostitute is harmful to all sex workers: “The term prostitute was once seen as a standard ‘neutral’ term used in research and scholarly writing...However, some researchers feel that prostitute has become a pejorative label loaded with the stigma attached to those who engage in prostitution” (Koken, Bimbi, Parsons, & Halkitis, 2004, p. 31). Another critique is that the desire to abolish prostitution is both unrealistic and unreasonable and it should instead be regulated to make it as safe as possible. Additionally, some argue that the radical feminist stance simplifies gender to a universal binary and does not account for more nuanced understanding of how race, ethnicity, social class, and non-conforming genders (such as queer identifying or transgender individuals) access power, and under what specific circumstances one may access or resist or acquire power.

Liberal feminism and sex work

Liberal feminism has a long history that has led up to the current stance of liberal feminists on sex work:

Liberal feminism has always been a voice, though one that has often gone unheard, throughout the 300-year history of liberal political theory...In the 18th century, they argued that women as well as men had natural rights; in the 19th century, they employed utilitarian arguments in favor of equal rights for women under the law; and in the 20th century with the development of the liberal theory of the welfare state, liberal feminists demand that the state should actively pursue a variety of social reforms in order to ensure equal opportunities for women” (Jaggar, 1988, p. 27-28).

This tradition of gender equality with the help of state social reforms, frames liberal feminists' point of view about sex work as a social problem in need of regulation (not abolition). Structuring prostitution as labor or as *sex work*, liberal feminists created an argument for decriminalization or regulation of sex work based on equality (for men, women, and the LGBT community) and human and labor rights.

The term “sex work” was conceived in its modern usage in 1980 by Carol Leigh, a sex workers' rights activist and former sex worker. Both “sex work” and “sex worker” are used internationally, throughout the media, by academics, health service providers, and activists with the political implication of a labor or work perspective (BAYSWAN, 2004). With an emphasis on the labor of sex work, some academics, including me, utilize the term “sex work” as a political stance and make efforts to use more destigmatizing language around the sex industry to frame sex work as a labor practice. This perspective challenged (and continues to challenge) radical feminist assumptions about women, sex, sexuality and agency, and the emergence of the term “sex work” and its widely adopted usage indicated a shift in the discourse and opened up a new way of discussing prostitution. However, the stigma of sex work is not easily erased because of the long, negative history of prostitution cemented by criminalizing, pathologic and cultural discourses.

Theoretically, with the concept of sex work, sex workers were granted a new way to conceptualize their labor and to politically organize. “The inclusive meaning of sex work was and continues to be a deliberate strategy to organize women, men and transgender persons from a variety of sex-related professions under the category ‘sex worker’ for the purposes of finding common ground and building political alliances”

(Kempadoo qtd. in Koken, Bimbi, Parsons, & Halkitis, 2004, p. 32). Unfortunately, male and transgender sex workers have been historically erased from discussions of prostitution, and today there is still very little research on male and transgender sex workers that does not have a medical bent. Contemporary research on male sex workers typically has focused on men and HIV transmission or male prostitution and HIV/AIDS. Yet, with little qualitative data analysis to contextualize the quantitative medical data collected, it is difficult to gather an accurate depiction of the everyday lived realities of male and transgender sex workers.

While there are “a hyper-production of writings” (Agustín, 1988, p. 6) about the concept of prostitution, Agustín points out that in the literature of radical feminists versus liberal feminists “it is common for each side to do little more than criticize the other” (ibid., p. 7). Melissa Ditmore, Antonia Levy, and Alys Willman (2010) concur that “there is a longstanding, well-known and over-discussed divide among feminists themselves about the very nature of sex work” (p. 2). Therefore, it is important for us to better understand how these two oppositional discourses influence sex workers themselves.

MEDICAL RESEARCH AND SEX WORK

With the explosion of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s and the historical precedent of sex workers as vectors of disease, much funding was (and still is) directed toward the medical-model of sex work research (Estebanez, Fitch, & Najera, 1993; Jackson, Highcrest, & Coates, 1992; Pyett & Warr, 1997). Within sex work research, “[f]rom the beginning of the 1980s onward, the larger body of literature relating to occupational hazards concerned HIV risk” (Vanwesenbeeck, 2001, p. 245). However, even the medical-model of sex work research highlighted a small population: street-based

workers. As Laura Agustín (2010) argues, “many people interested only in epidemiology are frustrated because so much research continues to focus on street workers and reproduce the same information over and over again” (p. 25). Yet, the implications of HIV/AIDS as a “gay man’s disease” also led to a growing body of research of men who have sex with men, finally bringing male sex workers into the discourse, though still in the medical-model and still focusing on street-based workers. This created a significant shift in the literature from individual pathologizing to a broader scope of the male sex work milieu (Scott, et al., 2005; Joffe & Dockrell, 1995), and in the 1990s the focus changed from “the individual sex worker to the sex work industry” (Browne & Minichiello, 1996, p. 30). The scholarship on HIV/AIDS risk reduction (at least within some disciplines) gradually shifted away from more individualistic models about behavior to a focus on structural (macro-level) interventions, led in part by the work on the social context of HIV risk provided in anthropology (Katsulis & Durfee, 2012). This was a significant modification, because many scholars studying sex work shifted from individual pathologizing to a broader scope of the sex work milieu, including sex workers of all genders (Scott, et al., 2005; Joffe & Dockrell, 1995) and this helped to shape the idea of a sex work “community” or “subculture” or what I will call an “occupational subaltern counterpublic.”²³

Additionally, in the second half of the 20th century, the literature shifted to emphasize *why* one chose to participate in sex work. Childhood sexual abuse or early victimization emerged as an “explanation” for sex work by many authors, and “[t]he (early) research on physical and sexual abuse of women revealed a relatively high

²³ The nuances of “subculture” versus the concept of an “occupational subaltern counterpublic” will be discussed in later chapters.

percentage of prostitutes among childhood abuse victims” (Vanwesenbeeck, 2001, p. 244; Silbert & Pines, 1981; James & Meyerding, 1977). Unfortunately, such statistics were derived from a small sample of (exclusively) women who were street-based, in jails, or part of social service agencies, so they did not serve as a representative sample of the sex work population as a whole. However, the notion of childhood victimization as an antecedent for prostitution remains a powerful cultural myth.

With much of the literature on sex work focused on how sex workers and the sex work industry affected the greater dominant culture, only recently has more research begun to center on the lived realities of sex workers and the emotional and physical effects of stigma on the population (Dewey, 2011; Katsulis, 2009; Sallman, 2010). A review of the literature written by sex worker rights’ advocates and many post-modern feminists suggests a much more complex understanding of sex workers’ personal lives (Chapkis, 1997; Kempadoo, 2004; Leigh, 2002). This is also true of the male and transgender sex work communities where “[r]ecent work...shows that the intrinsic nature of sex work is not all oppressive and that there are different kinds of worker and client experiences and varying degrees of victimization, exploitation, agency, and choice” (Flood, Gardiner, Pease, & Pringle, 2007, p. 509).

To further expand on the academic literature, there was a small body of literature written by sex workers themselves that further interrogated and disrupted traditional stereotypes of sex workers’ realities with the clear goal of establishing worker agency and privileging the voice of sex workers. These texts often argued that sex workers could enjoy their work and the subsequent relationships that sex work facilitated (Delacoste & Alexander, 1998; Oakley, 2007). There was also a small body of research on male and

transgender sex workers, who were often an afterthought within some research or were left out of the discourse entirely (for some exceptions, see: Browne & Minichiello, 1995; Calhoun & Weaver, 1996).²⁴ At the time, the transgender sex work population in the United States was targeted for disease/prevention related research (see Operario, Soma, & Underhill, 2008 for a meta-analysis of studies among HIV status among transgender women; Cohan, et al., 2006; Bockington, Robinson, & Rosser, 1998).²⁵ Additionally, the majority of research on transgender sex work focused on male-to-female (MTF) transwomen (Sausa, Keatley, & Operario, 2007; Shannon et al., 2008) and research on female-to-male (FTM) sex work remains scarce. It is only relatively recent research that reveals that not all male sex workers can be characterized as psychologically unstable, desperate, or destitute (Aggleton, 1999; Scott et. al., 2005; West & de Villiers, 1993) and that a growing number engage in sex work as an occupational choice and as the outcome of a rational economic decision (Mariño, Minichiello, & Disogra, 2003; Minichiello et al., 2001; Thomas, 2000; Weitzer, 2000) (qtd. in Scott et al., 2005, p. 321).

INSUFFICIENT BINARIES IN SEX WORK DISCOURSE

One reason for such little research on male and transgender sex workers could be the predominance of heteronormative constructs such as the heterosexual marketplace, where men are thought to have both the money and desire to purchase sexual services exclusively from women. It may also be a result of the sex wars of the late 1970's and 1980's articulated by radical feminists such as Kathleen Barry and Catherine Mackinnon

²⁴ While Calhoun and Weaver's (1996) article is an interesting assessment that demonstrates the decision for men to engage in street prostitution as a complicated process, weighing perceived benefits against perceived risks, the gender bias in their analysis is clear as they utilize terms like "rational" and "sexual pleasure" which are rarely used when analyzing female street-based sex work.

²⁵ For some excellent exceptions, please see: Weinberg, Shaver, & Williams, 1999; Sausa, Keatley, & Operario, 2007. For a critical evaluation of theoretical and empirical literature on contemporary sex work see Weitzer, 2005b.

who constructed prostitution as an exploitive form of violence toward women. During this time, sex trafficking was brought to the forefront and became a popular political issue with government funding used to “save” the women and children who were “victims” of trafficking and sexual exploitation; these concerns echoed previous moral panics about white slavery in the 19th and early 20th centuries.²⁶ Yet, even some researchers who seek to subvert the binaries established in the sex wars frame their arguments with a sex-worker-as-female premise (Vance, 1984; Rubin, 1999). Therefore, I explicitly sought to include men and transgender sex workers in this study to acknowledge a reality beyond the gender binary that includes multiple masculinities and femininities. This also acknowledges that men do not alone perpetrate violence, do not alone enjoy erotic sex, do not alone perpetuate stigma, and do not alone hold power, complicating some radical feminists’ arguments about sex work.

SEX WORK AND IDENTITY

Another popular binary in sex work research divides sex worker groups into categories of “indoor” and “outdoor” (or, street-based) workers.²⁷ However, this leaves a substantial gap in the literature. A discussion of more complex work-venue scenarios could create a better understanding of when and how sex workers negotiate which venues to work from and the benefits and consequences of those choices as they relate to their identities and to their material realities. Additionally, focusing beyond a venue-binary

²⁶ Human trafficking is a reality, and in no way do I wish to diminish this reality. However, an overwhelming amount of research, funding, and ideology about sex work are based on narratives and policies about trafficking. For further reading of research that complicates the notion of trafficking please see: Zheng, 2010; Agustín, 1988; Katsulis, Weinkauff, & Frank, 2010).

²⁷ Examples of research on exclusively outdoor or street-based workers include: Dalla, 2002, 2006; Pyett & Warr, 1997; Kurtz, Surratt, Inciardi, & Kiley, 2004; Hester & Westmarland, 2004; McKeganey & Barnard, 1996. Examples of research on exclusively indoor workers include: Sanders, 2005; Vanwesenbeek, 2005. Examples of research that compares indoor and outdoor sex work: Whittaker & Hart, 1996; Murphy & Venkatesh, 2006; Raphael & Shapiro, 2004.

allows for investigating if and how the boundaries of indoor and outdoor sex work are permeable, and if working in multiple venues offers the best means of financial gain and a more complex identity construction. This would contribute to the current literature that consistently (and perhaps erroneously) compares “indoor” with “outdoor” workers.

While there is an extensive amount of literature on identity and identity construction within various cultures and subcultures, literature on sex worker identity construction is nearly non-existent (for exceptions: Brewis & Linstead, 2000a, 2000b). Yet, identity is such an important part of how we understand both ourselves and others and the world in which we live. “Cultural identities are marked by a number of factors—‘race,’ ethnicity, gender and class to name a few; but the very real locus of these factors, however, is the notion of difference” (Clarke, 2008, p. 510). This “notion of difference” is at the heart of the literature on identity.

Erving Goffman’s *Stigma* (1963) is the first work to explore how certain identities are stigmatized and pathologized within a society, leading to a “spoiled” identity for some members. I use and expand upon Goffman’s concept of “stigma” as “the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance” (p. 9). Michel Foucault (1975, 1984) then examines how various state apparatus attempt to “normalize” or “discipline” non-normative identities. In *Discipline and Power* (1975), Foucault examines the intersections of power and knowledge as they exert a form of identity normalization through social construction. For example, “[a]s we move on to the social construction of sexuality...there is a strong argument that cultural identity is linked to discourses and power” (Clarke, 2008, p. 510). Taken together, Goffman and Foucault

can be springboards for understanding how stigma affects both group and individual identity constructions and the lived material consequences of stigma.

CONCLUSION

Using public sphere theory as a lens for sex work discourse aids in exploring the complex and overlapping tensions between historical and prevailing medical, religious and legal ideologies, social and economic conditions, and access to power that have influenced (and continue to influence) conceptions of both sex work and sexuality. A review of the literature suggests, however, that we cannot examine *just* sex work discourse because it is so entangled with notions of sexuality, race, and class. Therefore, an intersectional analysis is key to developing a more nuanced understanding of how stigma and identity construction function both at the individual and group level. This chapter proves that discourses construct regimes of practice that often benefit the dominant group and malign the marginalized, but counterpublics can emerge and entrance to the public sphere can shift. After all, counterpublics have the power to aid in the construction of identity as well (Warner, 2005, p. 56). Yet, counterpublics themselves are diverse groups with multifarious identity constructions among members, which begs the questions: whose voices continue to get left out of the discourse? And so what if they do? The prevailing radical and liberal feminist ideologies circulating within the public offer some insight to these questions, but this study aims to take those questions further.

Chapter 2

THEORY & METHOD

*The challenges involved in the design of ethical, nonexploitative research projects with sex workers, or indeed with any marginal or stigmatized population, are significant.*²⁸

The above quote from Frances Shaver (2005) highlights the ethical and methodological differences that exist for researchers who work with stigmatized populations, specifically sex workers. There are a host of unique challenges for researchers in this field, including: difficulty accessing marginalized and criminalized groups; accessing a representative sample of the group; maintaining a participant-centered study that simultaneously protects the criminalized population; and ensuring that the study design does not represent sex workers as a homogenous population (ibid.). Taking this into account, this chapter discusses the theoretical and methodological strategies I employed in an effort to ensure that my study was both methodologically and ethically sound.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

I began my research with the central question of how male, female, and transgender sex workers of all sexualities, ages, ethnicities and venues (i.e., street-based, in-call and out-call escorts, strip club, dungeon, etc.) construct their individual identity (or multiple-identities) as a member of (or outside of) a social or family network, and how language facilitates the construction and maintenance of such identities. I was particularly interested in the question of whether alternative kinship models exist among all or any of these groups, how individuals become situated within social and family networks, and how they construct their identities within these groups.

²⁸ Shaver, 2005, p. 314.

However, as my study progressed my hypothesis and research questions began to shift. Throughout all iterations of the research questions, I asked each interviewee one important, consistent question: Do you consider yourself a sex worker?²⁹ Responses to this question reveal a complex construction of identity that is often based on discourses of shame, disease, and stigma but is sometimes bolstered by newer, emerging discourses of activism and sex worker pride. Therefore, my research questions later evolved to: 1. How have the discourses about and around sex work come to be? 2. How do sex workers utilize (or resist) these discourses to construct their own identities? 3. What are the consequences of these discourses and the identity constructions to which they ultimately lead?

SETTING: ST. JAMES INFIRMARY

On the street where St. James Infirmary is located, there are usually a dozen or so people of various ages and ethnicities walking the sidewalks at any given time of the day or night, a fairly typical street scene for San Francisco. Standing outside of the clinic, having a smoke, are usually staff members or community members. Once community members walk through the tinted glass doors, they are greeted by the “registration assistant” who registers them for services and maintains the small waiting area that holds about eight chairs. The waiting room is anything but a typical clinic’s waiting room. The walls are adorned with provocative posters of sex workers, photographs from previous events, and bras and underwear that are decorated with anything from pink fur to studs to buttons, but the decorations of the waiting area serve a greater purpose than just whimsy. They create a non-judgmental, unintimidating, very un-clinical feeling space that

²⁹ Each respondent revealed they were familiar with the term, whether they associated themselves with it or not.

emphasizes “community.” Proceeding through the waiting area, there is a long narrow hallway with an office to left and to the right. Then, along the left side of the hallway are four exam rooms. On the right side of the hallway, across from the exam rooms, is the large “community room” that is open to community members one evening per week.

I chose the St. James Infirmary as the site of my data collection because they are a clinic with a unique peer-based model and because they offer a program exclusively for transgender sex workers. St. James Infirmary is “an occupational safety & health clinic for sex workers founded by sex work activists from COYOTE (Call off Your Old Tired Ethics) and the Exotic Dancers Alliance in collaboration with the STD prevention and control section of the San Francisco Department of Public Health” (Akers & Evans, 2010, p. 7). St. James is located on Mission Street, just outside of the Tenderloin District of San Francisco, on a graffitied block that is littered with empty cans, papers, cigarette butts, and various refuse. The Tenderloin is notorious for being a high-crime neighborhood and parts of the Tenderloin have a violent crime rate 35 times higher than elsewhere in San Francisco (CBS local, 2011). Being located just outside of the Tenderloin is advantageous for St. James Infirmary because it is accessible to much of the population that it aims to serve, many of whom live in or close to the Tenderloin or seek alternate community resources within this area.³⁰ St. James Infirmary “is the only full-spectrum health clinic run by sex workers for sex workers” (Akers & Evans, 2010, p. 7) and offers services including acupuncture and massage therapy, confidential HIV and

³⁰ Community resources in this area include (but are not limited to) mental health education and awareness resources, sexual assault and violence advocacy, and living and vocational services. For a complete list of the many social services available in this area, please see The San Francisco Foundation’s (2009) guide, *HELP: Neighborhood Resources South of Market and Tenderloin* which can be found online: <http://studycenter.org/test/cce/RESOURCES/issues/helpguide.pdf>

sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing and counseling, medical care, immunizations, transgender healthcare, peer counseling, food, clothing, condoms, lubricant, and syringe access and distribution as part of their needle exchange program.

The mission of St. James Infirmary is:

to provide non-judgmental and compassionate healthcare and social services for all sex workers while preventing occupational illnesses and injuries through a continuum of care. We provide services for current, former, and transitional street and survival sex workers, escorts, sensual massage workers, erotic performers and entertainers, exotic dancers, peep show workers, bondage/ dominatrix/ sado-masochism (BDSM) workers, adult film actors, nude models, Internet pornography workers, phone sex operators and their current sex partners. (Akers & Evans, 2010, p. 7)

As this mission demonstrates, St. James is a holistic and inclusive service provider for all types of sex workers within the San Francisco Bay Area, making it a promising site for observation and recruitment.

Being in the San Francisco Bay Area gave me greater access to male and transgender workers and put me in the heart of the sex workers' rights movement. I was drawn to the St. James Infirmary because of their clear mission to support transgender sex workers and their specific program, STRIDE, to do so: "The mission of the St. James Infirmary STRIDE program is to support & serve our transgender participants with their medical, social & psychological health. With a peer-based model, we have created a hormone therapy team of transgender & non-transgender health care professionals. We work collectively to support & serve our transgender participants" (St. James Infirmary,

2012). Because of the diverse population that either accesses St. James Infirmary or works with them to support sex workers' rights, I was able to recruit a diverse sample set of sex workers. Due to this, I was able to gather diverse and interesting data that has led to a complex analysis of sex work discourse; the influence of such discourse on notions of stigma about and within the sex work community; and the effect on sex workers' identity constructions.

INTERSECTIONAL THEORY

Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) coined the term “intersectionality,” arguing that women of color’s experience “cannot be captured wholly by looking at the race or gender dimensions of those experiences separately” (p. 139). Crenshaw utilizes this theory to show that black women had been excluded from discrimination lawsuits because they were not viewed as “women,” an identity category claimed solely by white women, and they were not “black,” an identity category claimed solely by men (Crenshaw, 1991). Thus, intersectionality originally focused on the intersections of race and gender, and emphasized black women’s experiences of subjectivity and oppression. While Crenshaw coined the term and initially utilized it for legal analysis, the notion of “relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations” (McCall, 2005, p. 1771) has a long history among feminist scholars (Brah & Phoenix, 2004; Kitch, 2009; Hancock, 2007).³¹ As Ange-Marie Hancock (2007) argues, “the idea of analyzing race, gender and class identities together has existed for over a century. The term “intersectionality” refers to *both* a normative theoretical argument *and* an approach

³¹ Kitch (2009) argues that theories defining the race-gender connection take those intersections as “givens rather than explain why they exist, what processes conspired to conjoin race and gender in the first place, and whether they were always inextricably fused” (p. 3). Thus, her work is unique because it analyzes how these identity categories came to overlap in particular historical moments.

to conducting empirical research that emphasizes the interaction of categories of difference (including, but not limited to race, gender, class, and sexual orientation)” (p. 63, original italics). In the late 1990s, “Leela Fernandes and Evelyn Nakano Glenn amplified *intersectionality* by defining respectively an *integrative framework* and *relationality*, in which race, class, and gender are understood as mutually constituted and inseparable” (Kitch, 2009, p. 2, original italics). Intersectionality is useful as an analytic tool to highlight the limitations of gender as a single, separable analytical category, and the term “intersectionality” has become “a handy catchall phrase that aims to make visible the multiple positioning that constitutes everyday life and the power relations that are central to it” (Phoenix, 2006, p. 187).

However, intersectionality has also been critiqued by feminists because of this vague “catchall” phrase that Phoenix suggests, and also because of both a lack of well-defined methodological approaches to capture the intersectional processes and its observable, empirical validity (Nash, 2008; McCall, 2005; Phoenix, 2006). Nash (2008) also argues that a weakness of intersectional theory is “the use of black women as prototypical intersectional subjects” (p. 4), but so much intersectional analysis has expanded beyond black women that it is difficult to concede to Nash’s point (Glenn, 2002; Young, 1997; Grewal, 2003; Kauanui, 2009; L.K. Hall, 2008).³² An additional critique of intersectionality is that some scholars debate whether intersectionality is “a theory of marginalized subjectivity or a generalized theory of identity” (Nash, 2008, p. 10). Finally, there are important differences between methodological, structural and political intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991). Methodological intersectionality is critiqued,

³² Even Nash (2008) points out, “the overwhelming majority of intersectional scholarship has centered on the particular positions of multiply- marginalized subjects” (p. 10).

for example, because “[m]ost of the empirical...research on or with lesbians and gay men is still conducted with overwhelmingly white, middle class, young, able-bodied participants, most often urban, college student or well-educated populations” (Greene, 2000, p. 378), thus there are concerns about the empirical methods to test the outcomes of particular social positions. Structural intersectionality aims to expose patterns of social inequality (McCall, 2005). Political intersectionality relates to the ways inequalities are relevant to political strategies. It refers to the ability of groups located at the intersections to mobilize politically in terms of their access to data to support their claims and how the interests of groups at the intersections are often perceived to be in conflict with those of others (Crenshaw, 1991). Because of these critiques and nuances, scholars utilizing intersectionality must situate themselves within these debates and clearly define how they are using intersectionality. I will be using methodological intersectionality by incorporating a varied group of study subjects; structural intersectionality by exposing the historical and contemporary maintenance of social inequalities for sex workers; and political intersectionality by examining how sex worker rights’ activists have utilized their position as a marginalized and intersectional group to politically mobilize in the Bay Area.

Not all scholars have embraced intersectionality and queer liberalism nearly stands in direct opposition. Queer liberalism argues that there has been the empowerment of certain gays and lesbians in the United States, economically through a visible queer consumer lifestyle and politically through emerging legal protections. Queer liberalism positions the United States within a “colorblind moment” and “works to oppose a politics of intersectionality, resisting any acknowledgement of the ways in

which sexuality and race are constituted in relation to one another... In short, queer liberalism is predicated on the systematic dissociation of (homo)sexuality from race as coeval and intersecting phenomena” (Eng, 2010, p. 4). Yet, this notion is flawed, as Eng points out:

a politics of colorblindness willfully refuses to acknowledge the increasing socio-economic disparities that mark our society, while also refusing to see these disparities as anything other than the just distribution of inequality to those who are unwilling to participate on the so-called level playing field of the neoliberal market. (p. 5)

Following Eng’s line of reasoning, utilizing an intersectional paradigm creates a more nuanced understanding of identity that recognizes ways in which overlapping axes of identity facilitate positions of dominance and subordination and influence individual subjectivities.

Due to these controversies, I will clearly articulate how I utilize intersectional theory in this project. I agree with the intersectional paradigm that views race, class, gender, (dis)ability, and many other categories of identity as mutually constructive systems of power that cannot be teased apart from each other. Therefore, in my analysis, I emphasize multiple axes of identity that include age, race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class. This does not mean that I think other axes of identity are any less important, but moving age, race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class to the center of my analysis highlights their interactions within the sex work community and reveals how these interacting systems influence feelings of stigma and identity-construction. Additionally, I believe that intersectionality functions as a *generalized theory of identity* because it is

possible to exercise privilege in some settings and not in others; it is possible for the oppressed to become the oppressor. Power can be decentralized, dispersed, fragmented, and constantly present (Foucault, 1975).

I do not want to deploy oversimplified identity categories, especially when aiming to do an in-depth intersectional analysis of a stigmatized, criminalized population.

However, acknowledging and appropriately applying identity categories is necessary when discussing and analyzing identity construction. I am aware of the multiple critiques of the implicit and explicit harm of identity categories. For example, Butler (1993) argues, “[i]dentity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes whether as normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for liberatory contestation of that very oppression” (p. 307). Butler is right to complicate the concept of identity categories because they serve many functions, and sometimes the function is oppression. However, identity categories are necessary for discussion, meaning-making, and political action. As James Gee (1999) explains, “[g]roups and institutions render certain sorts of activities and identities meaningful; certain sorts of activities and identities constitute the nature and existence of specific social groups and institutions” (p. 1). Therefore, it is with great care that I “unpack” the categories of race, gender, class, and sexuality in this analysis.

As a result of intersectional theory, feminist researchers have come to understand that “the individual’s social location as reflected in intersecting identities must be at the forefront in any investigation of gender” (Shields, 2008, p. 301). According to intersectional theory, “[r]acial and gendered identities are socially produced, and yet they are fundamental to our selves as knowing, feeling, and acting subjects” (Alcoff, 2006, p.

126). Discourse is how we express and understand that knowing, feeling and acting. Discourse is how we express not only our world, but also our place in the world, which is why intersectionality and grounded theory work together to create an excellent framework for an analysis of the sex work community.

METHOD: GROUNDED THEORY

Grounded theory is a qualitative methodology developed by two sociologists, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967), in their book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. In this text, Glaser and Strauss stress that this research method *builds theory from data*, rather than the tradition of having a pre-determined hypothesis. This allows the researcher to see what themes emerge from the data set rather than mapping themes onto the data set (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Bernard & Ryan, 2010). The benefit of this for a study about sex workers is that grounded theory does not test a hypothesis (as other approaches used in public health and the social sciences often do), rather it sets out to find what theory is applicable for the research situation and data collected (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Grounded theory emphasizes that human experience is unique but also patterned. Grounded theory also focuses on the individual experience and person-centered interviews, asking “Tell me how you came to be...” not “tell me how people come to be” (Bernard & Ryan, 2010, p. 266-268). This allows the researcher more freedom to gain insight into the lived experience of the subject, and for me, to gain insight into the lived experience of sex work specifically, because the researcher using grounded theory does not (or at the very least *should* not) approach the subject with any pre-conceived theoretical underpinnings.

Critiques of grounded theory are that it is too “objectivist” and believes in a truth (with a small t) that can be explained. This critique includes doubt that it is possible for researchers to approach data without assumptions or prior theories. Rather, it is argued that whatever researchers do is embedded in theory and interpretation. Therefore, Kathy Charmaz (2006) developed an alternative called constructivist grounded theory which suggests that informants and researchers create data together, interactively during the interview (p. 270). Today there are several competing schools of grounded theory (including Strauss and Corbin; Glaser; and Charmaz). I follow the Strauss and Corbin school of thought which advocates for reading the literature on a topic as part of grounded theory; emphasizes deduction; utilizes axial coding in which the researcher looks to discover the relationship among concepts; and sampling, coding, and theory building all develop together (Bernard & Ryan, 2010, p. 270). All of these approaches involve three important steps when it comes to data collection and analysis: 1. Coding text and theorizing as you go 2. Memoing and theorizing as you go 3. Integrating and refining and writing up theories. This means that the researcher begins coding and analysis with the first interview and interview questions evolve as the researcher memos about important connections and emerging theories. Finally, new theories emerge based on the data. Additionally, both the realist and constructivist camps agree that researcher reflexivity is key to any analysis.

There are unique methodological and ethical challenges posed by sex work research, specifically: the labeling of all sex workers as victims; the prevalence of dichotomies within sex work research (good/bad; indoor/outdoor; victim/empowered); and the notion that sex workers are a homogenous population (Shaver, 2005). Because of

these issues, even well-meaning researchers can approach their subjects with biased assumptions, and those assumptions can carry over into their analysis. In an effort to mitigate these challenges, my study includes a broad subject sample of sex workers with a wide age range, of various races and ethnicities, genders and social classes, and who work in different venues (thereby achieving methodological intersectionality).

Traditionally, other methodologies used in public health and the social sciences have been more focused on *quantitative* methods. For example, there is a breadth of quantitative research that has been conducted about STI and HIV transmission among the sex worker population; there is quantitative research about sex trafficking and arrests among sex worker populations and quantitative comparisons between sex workers working in brothels versus street-based. However, the statistics generated by these data are difficult to contextualize without a qualitative understanding of the lived experience of sex work. Additionally, quantitative data can sometimes produce skewed results, particularly in a population such as sex workers who are transient, difficult as a whole to quantify, and clandestine. Corbin and Strauss (2008) repeat throughout their work that every person has a voice and wants to be heard. Grounded theory allows for that voice to be heard, and while I am still the “interpreter” of that voice, grounded theory minimizes the researcher’s interference with the message and, perhaps most importantly, creates a context for understanding the everyday lived realities of the sex work community.

Susan Dewey (2011) calls for “an anthropology of the heart” that “aims to document the intricacies and contradictions of...people’s lives with dignity, thus aiming to relocate the identity boundaries of privilege in some small way” (p. 19). Grounded theory as a method of analysis can aid in revealing those intricacies, which helps us “to

think more deeply about the meanings we give people's words so as to make ourselves better, more humane people and the world a better, more human place" (Gee, 1999, p. xii). To do this, we must understand the relevance of "people's words," language itself, and discourse. Therefore, grounded theory is an excellent method to foster discourse analysis because it privileges the voice of the respondent.

Consistent with qualitative methodology, my interview questions were open-ended to "allow people to respond in their own words and capture people's own ideas about how things work" (Bernard & Ryan, 2010, p. 54). I used a qualitative approach to this study because "qualitative research allows researchers to get at the inner experience of participants, to determine how meanings are formed through and in culture, and to discover rather than test variables" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 12). Additionally, qualitative methodology allows for fluid, evolving and dynamic interviews. As the evolution of my interview questions reflect, my goals continued to be: to understand the experiences of sex workers from the sex workers' perspective; to understand role of stigma among the sex work community; and to investigate how sex workers construct or resist specific identities. Furthermore, qualitative methodology allows for self-reflexivity in analysis, which is an important component when analyzing identity. This allows me to situate myself as the researcher in the center of the analysis and explore my own identity and biases as they emerged through the fieldwork process. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, a qualitative methodology allows me the flexibility and openness to explore complex concepts and constructs.

Recruitment

To find participants for the study, I placed large fliers around St. James Infirmary smaller “quarter fliers” in stacks near the sign-in area where sex work community members register for their appointments.³³ These fliers had information about the study, a study-specific email address, and phone number for a temporary “study phone” with a dedicated phone number. This was a very successful means of recruitment, and I received many phone calls and several emails. Because of my volunteer work and growing personal network through St. James Infirmary, I also relied upon word-of-mouth. If an interviewee did not qualify for the study for some reason (i.e., if a female called but I had already interviewed a high percentage of female subjects), I asked permission to put their name and contact information on a “wait list,” and in the event an interviewee missed their appointment, occasionally I would use someone from the wait list to fill in that appointment.

When I completed an interview, I would tell the interviewee about the services that St. James offered and hand them several quarter-fliers for the study, asking them to hand the fliers out to anyone else they knew who might be interested. This method of “snowball sampling” proved to be very helpful in getting me interview subjects who did not have knowledge of St. James Infirmary and extended the reach of the study to areas of the community to which I did not have access. An important note about snowball sampling is that it can influence the study demographic because it is not a random

³³ “Community member” is the term St. James Infirmary uses instead of “client” or “patient” in an effort to create a sense of community and identity outside of “sex worker.” Additionally, some sex workers utilize the term “client” to refer to their johns and may have a complicated relationship with the connotations of that term. “Patient” also has negative connotations for some because of the historical pathologizing of sex workers.

sample. However, this study does not claim to have a representative demographic of the population of sex workers in San Francisco, so snowball sampling was simply advantageous.

Additionally, the staff at St. James Infirmary helped me recruit participants, and they also had access to spaces within the sex work community that I did not. For example, St. James does a lot of venue testing and outreach work at various sites throughout the city. It has taken St. James years to build trust with some of these sites and this trust could be compromised by a new face, a researcher no less, suddenly appearing to recruit participants for a study. Luckily for me, one particular staff member, Janey,³⁴ helped me tremendously with my recruitment efforts. She actively recruited at various sites and aided me in getting a diverse demographic profile of participants. I also conducted follow up interviews with three of the interviewees to clarify some questions and expand upon their answers. In addition, I conducted interviews with the Executive Director and the then-Assistant Director of St. James Infirmary.

Inclusion / Exclusion Criteria

When a potential interview candidate called or emailed, I would ask four screening questions: 1. How old are you? 2. What is your gender: male, female, transgender, gender queer, or other? 3. When is the last time you participated in sex work? 4. Are you currently working independently or are you “managed” by anyone? The goal of the screening questions was to ensure my interviewees were 18 years old or older per my IRB requirements; to ensure gender diversity in my data sample; to ensure interviewees had “recently” worked, with “recently” being defined by me as working

³⁴ This name has been changed.

within the last six months; and to get a diverse sample of independent and “managed” workers.

Sampling Framework

I aimed to recruit a diverse sample set because “it is essential to develop strategies that increase the potential for revealing diversity within each sector of the [sex work] industry as well as between sectors” (Shaver, 2005, p. 297). Therefore, I included male, female, and transgender sex workers, of all races and ethnicities, ages 18 and older from all areas of sex work (i.e., street based, in-call/out-call, dancers, pornography, BDSM, etc.). A diverse sample-set reflects the range of the population of sex workers, highlights individual perspectives on stigma and identity, and enables the exploration of difference between members of the same community, allowing for a richer data analysis and defying stereotypes of a homogenous population.

Sample Description

I conducted 31 face-to-face interviews that ranged from one to two-and-a-half hours. Age range of participants was from 22 to 66 years of age; nine participants self-identified as Caucasian; four as Hispanic; ten as African American; seven as Other (which included bi- and multi-racial; and one participant declined to state his race). The gender demographic included eight males (one of the eight identified as male and wished to transition, but could not due to the cost of the transition. He also claimed that there were contraindications between the hormones he would have to take in his transition with

his life-saving AIDS medications);³⁵ 11 females; 12 transgender or gender queer;³⁶ seven of the 12 identified as male-to-female transgender, and three identified as female-to-male.

San Francisco is a very well-educated city, and as my interviews reflect, many sex workers in San Francisco are well educated. The education range was broad among the sample, ranging from five participants who did not complete high school to eight who had completed high school and 18 who had some college, a bachelor's degree and/or a master's degree. Education level is important to note because as Solomon, Smith, and Del Rio's (2008) research suggests, lower education levels may correlate to higher sexually transmitted infections and risk-taking behaviors among commercial sex workers. Additionally, the higher the education of my interviewees, the more likely they were to adopt the identity of "sex worker" and particularly "sex worker activist."

San Francisco is an expensive city with a high cost of living, and several of the sex workers that I interviewed lived below the poverty level, engaging in sex work for survival, not as a political or social statement. Several of the interviewees were homeless or had precarious shelter (such as a government subsidized single room occupancy [SRO] or long term housing in a shelter). The exorbitant cost of living in San Francisco was consistently expressed in many of the interviews and cited as a reason for participating in

³⁵ I could not find any research to support this interviewees' claim. Dr. Chuck Cloniger, a practicing infectious disease doctor, who does not treat this patient told me: "[a]s to the issue of race and gender transition, I could find no indication in the medical literature that supports that race, in and of itself, is a factor affecting gender transition. However, race-based genetic predispositions for certain cardiovascular risk profiles could be a factor in tailoring a gender transition plan involving estrogens. But even if estrogens might not be safe for certain individuals there are usually non-estrogen or surgical options that would remain available for transition" (personal communication, February, 24, 2013). Despite this information, it is still interesting to note that this individual was either told or at least perceives his gender transition to be impossible due to his AIDS status.

³⁶ Two of the 12 identified as gender queer—each of the two was born female. One was on hormone therapy and had no surgery; one was on hormone therapy and had a breast reduction.

sex work. In my sample, monthly incomes ranged from \$0-\$10,000, with five participants declining to state their income.

Sampling limitations

My study demographic was heavily influenced by the demographic of the clinic. Because St. James Infirmary is one of the few clinics in the country that offers services to low income transgender sex workers, I had access to a larger population of transgender sex workers than most other researchers (38% n=31 of my subjects identified as “transgender” or “gender queer”). It was likely that better educated and internet savvy sex workers could access these social services because they had the means of finding such services (of my data sample, 58% or n=31 had graduated high school and had some college, a bachelor’s, and/or a master’s degree). Additionally, it was likely easier for independent (not “managed”) sex workers to access social services than it might have been for those who did not work independently (80% n=31 were entirely independent workers; 13% identified as independent but supporting someone; 6% were managed). Sex workers without access to the internet, or who did not speak English, or who were managed (especially if managed by someone who was controlling or violent), were probably less able to utilize St. James and other community-based resources. The majority of my sample, therefore, worked independently, while one female and one male participant worked independently and “managed” others (as a “madam” and a “pimp”). My sample did not include workers from massage parlors, workers who currently had a violent and controlling manager, workers who did not speak English, or workers who relayed narratives associated with trafficking, due to the general inaccessibility of some of these groups.

The categories of “independent” or “managed” are problematic for sex work researchers. Several of the interviewees had, at one time, worked for a “pimp,” but when they were interviewed, they were working independently. Other interviewees classified themselves as independent but had a partner they supported with the money earned from sex work. For some sex workers, their partner would set up dates for them and benefit from either money or drugs. In this way, the partner would fit the legal definition of “pimp,” but that label was not used by the sex worker being interviewed.³⁷ In fact, many, many sex workers I interviewed did not use the term “pimp.” The term “pimp” is a problematic, in part, because the legal definition has become so removed from the cultural understanding of the term. Cecilie Hoigard and Liv Finstad (1986) attempt to complicate the notion of “pimp” by creating a taxonomy to include “non-violent boyfriend-pimps,” “violent boyfriend-pimps,” and “stable pimps,” but their definitions are insufficient because they employ the term “pimp,” and quite simply: this is not a term that many sex workers identify with.

Given the nature of my sampling framework, my data should not be viewed as representative of all sex workers in San Francisco. First, when conducting any research in the sex work community, one must admit that “the size and boundaries of the population are unknown, so it is extremely difficult to get a representative sample” (Shaver, 2005, p.

³⁷ California Law 266h section B states: “Any person who, knowing another person is a prostitute, lives or derives support or maintenance in whole or in part from the earnings or proceeds of the person's prostitution, or from money loaned or advanced to or charged against that person by any keeper or manager or inmate of a house or other place where prostitution is practiced or allowed, or who solicits or receives compensation for soliciting for the person, when the prostitute is a minor, is guilty of pimping a minor, a felony, and shall be punishable as follows: (1) If the person engaged in prostitution is a minor over the age of 16 years, the offense is punishable by imprisonment in the state prison for three, four, or six years. (2) If the person engaged in prostitution is under 16 years of age, the offense is punishable by imprisonment in the state prison for three, six, or eight years (Prostitution Laws of California, 2013).

296). It is also important to understand the difficulties in conducting research with a stigmatized population involved in illegal activity. As Ronald Weitzer (2005a) notes, “[g]aining access is a chronic challenge, as is any attempt to create samples that are not skewed in a certain direction” (p. 941). While not representative of the sex worker population in San Francisco as a whole, my data and analysis offer interesting insight into the identity construction of male, female, and transgender workers who generally work independently, who engage in multiple sex work economies, who have a broad range of socio-economic backgrounds, who vary in terms of access to social capital, and the extent to which they must negotiate stigma and their identity constructions.

Procedure

All interviewees first completed a brief survey that included demographic information (age, gender, education level, economic status, and drug use).³⁸ After the survey, I conducted face-to-face interviews that lasted anywhere from one hour to two-and-a-half-hours. The interview questions were open-ended and primarily focused on family history, sex work, and social and familial relationships.³⁹ All interviews were digitally recorded, and I took careful notes during the interviews. Most interviews were conducted in a private exam room during open clinic hours at St. James Infirmary. On one occasion I met an interviewee at her apartment and another at a public location just outside of San Francisco in the East Bay. To ensure confidentiality, the interviewee would draw a pseudonym from one of three small name bags that were labeled “male,” “female,” or “neutral.” That became their name for the study. I have also fictionalized certain elements of their lives, places of work, and any identifying physical

³⁸ Results from this survey can be found in Appendix A.

³⁹ All iterations of interview questions can be found in Appendix B.

characteristics to render them unrecognizable and thus protect their confidentiality.⁴⁰ In the event they mentioned another person's name during the interview, I changed that name to a pseudonym. Each interviewee was paid \$30 for their participation, and they were told about the different services that are offered at St. James Infirmery. Although most interviewees were familiar with St. James and its services, sometimes after an interview, I would help the interviewee set up an appointment for peer counseling or to see a clinician. This study received approval from both the Arizona State University Internal Review Board and the St. James Infirmery Internal Review Board.

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

My initial approach to the study included volunteering in the community room during open clinic hours, volunteering during closed clinic hours (assisting with making outreach kits, for example), and socializing with staff and community members during non-clinic hours. I chose an overtly "participant observation" approach in an effort to curb ethical dilemmas regarding my participation in the sex work community, which has an extensive and often distrustful relationship with researchers. The strategy also enabled me to establish rapport with various gatekeepers, responsible for not only approving the project but also for providing valuable insights. A consequence of being an overt observer is that sometimes I would have to assure people that specific conversations were "off the record" and some people had a fear or distrust of me simply because I was open about being a researcher. One of the unintended benefits of being an overt observer, however, is that I would continue to see some of the interviewees at the clinic, and they

⁴⁰ Two of the interviewees wanted to use their real names and the names of family members, but ultimately they relented and chose a pseudonym.

would consistently ask me about the project and its progress and showed genuine excitement and interest in the outcome.

During my initial months at St. James, I often felt uneasy. As a Caucasian, educated female who circulates primarily within the privileged class system, there was a distinct social and economic divide between the St. James' community and me. I tried to negotiate this divide by closeting some of my middle class privilege—specifically by not driving to the clinic but instead taking municipal transportation (where I would also see sex work community members and we would engage in conversation) and by taking care with my appearance. I was very careful about what clothing and jewelry I wore, and my general uniform included jeans, flat boots, a sweater or sweatshirt, an older coat, a black messenger bag, and a simple wedding band. I was an outsider to this community because I was not a sex worker and my social position as a researcher created a divide that I had to mitigate throughout my time at St. James. Eventually, I was able to earn the trust of both the staff and community members, but it took longer than I anticipated, and I did not always feel comfortable or welcome.

My prior research activities had exposed me to some sex workers' struggles with mental illness and drug use, but because of St. James' model of "meeting people where they're at," I now had regular, weekly interactions with people who were sometimes very high and/or suffering from mental illness that might have them feeling visibly agitated.⁴¹ For the most part, my interactions with the drug using/abusing or mentally ill population

⁴¹ St. James Infirmary believes that it is harmful to judge people for their life choices, including drug use. Therefore, "meeting people where they're at" is a mantra that means the clinic takes a neutral stance on drug use. This is exemplified by the needle exchange program and the availability of hypodermic containers in the bathroom for safe syringe disposal.

was not much of an issue, but some nights, the community room, where I primarily volunteered, was chaotic, as this excerpt from my field notes illustrates:

I'm not really sure what happened [at St. James Infirmary] tonight but it felt out of control. When I walked in to the community room, one transwoman was yelling at another woman on the computer, telling her that if she didn't get off the computer, she was "gonna get cut." Another man was so high that he was talking in literal circles—he was saying one thing after another while spinning in circles in front of me. Two men broke into a shouting match, about what, I'm not sure. Another man sat in the corner and quietly pulled a pair of black stockings out of his back pack and pulled them over his head, as if he was going to rob a bank, but he just sat there, playing with the feet of the stockings as they dangled down to his shoulders. When he would take a drink of water, he'd lift up the corner of the stocking to reveal his mouth, take a sip, and then pull the corner back down. Suddenly an older woman pushed her cart into the room and started singing, "I'm the mayor, I'm the mayor, vote for me!" (K. Read, field notes, August 31, 2012)

This excerpt from my field notes indicates that while St. James Infirmary could, at times, feel like a refuge for sex workers, there were sometimes greater structural forces and abuses that could not be abandoned at the clinic doors. For many community members, the end of the month, specifically a long (31-day) month like August, was very difficult. Checks for government support, such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Social Security benefits, and food stamps were received on the first of the month.⁴² Thus, if a

⁴² SSI is a Federal income supplement program funded by general tax revenues and is designed to help aged, blind, and disabled people, who have little or no income and provides cash to meet basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter (Social Security Administration, 2012).

sex worker received government support, which 42% (n=24) did, that money was likely running out toward the end of the month. In terms of sex work, it meant that it was also harder to find clients with money to spend. If a community member used or abused drugs regularly, this could also be a difficult time of the month because they may not be able to afford another fix until they get paid or they may have to buy a less quality product (for less money) to get them through to the first of the month. Naturally, at the end of a long month, tensions would be high and the mood and activity in the community room sometimes reflected this. This highlights the economically insecure nature of sex work that induces shifting vulnerabilities for sex workers based on their day-to-day pay schedules, and emphasizes that many sex workers have food and housing insecurities that cannot be adequately addressed by St. James' already thinly stretched resources.

My time volunteering at St. James Infirmary was spent almost exclusively in the community room making community members feel comfortable, answering questions for them, setting out and cleaning up hot food, playing movies, restocking the condom and lubrication bins, stocking the closet with donated clothing, and helping community members with the computer. The community room serves an important purpose within St. James because it creates a safe, welcoming space for people to relax while waiting to be seen by their care provider. For many sex workers, some of whom are homeless or work the dangerous streets, the community room offers a rare opportunity to relax. For some, it is a chance to be indoors, as Elijah (32, Caucasian, male, heterosexual) who is a homeless sex worker told me during our interview: "This is the first time I've been inside in five days." Additionally, the community room fosters a sense of community and offers a space where sex workers are able to talk to each other freely about their occupation,

their gender status, and drug use. For a criminalized and stigmatized population, this is especially important because they often negotiate to whom they can or cannot disclose their trans status, sexual identity, HIV/AIDS status, and occupation. Maya (25, Chinese and White, heterosexual, female) explains:

This is the only place where I feel at home. I feel like this is my refuge. I feel like this is my home because out in the real world I don't feel like I belong—I don't feel like I fit in. I have to censor myself. But here I can use...terminology [that "straight" people won't understand] but what ["straight"] people don't understand, I can use in here, and everyone gets me, relates to me and no one looks down upon me. I love this place.

As Maya's quote indicates, St. James Infirmary, and the community room specifically, can be a "refuge" to some sex workers who feel dissonance with the dominant culture because of stigma and the use of specialized terminology within the sex work community.

I spent a total of 11 hours training to work in the community room, at the needle exchange, and to do outreach. I spent approximately 150 hours of participant observation at St. James, mostly in the community room. This helped me get to know the regular community members that frequented the clinic and to interact with them in an unofficial/non-research capacity. I would later learn that spending this much time with the community members attributed me a certain amount of "street-cred" because I was willing to be "in the trenches" as one interviewee put it, with the sex work community. A staff member at St. James Infirmary also commented that I had really "paid my dues" and was impressed that I took the time to really get to know the community members. This

aided my research because it meant that some of my interviewees were more inclined to participate in the study and felt confident that I did not work for law enforcement. This was of particular importance to several of the interviewees who asked me pointedly if I was involved in law enforcement and questioned who else would be listening to the recorded interviews. One subject who emailed me asked: “How would I know you are not reporting to law enforcement or working for law enforcement or be assured that answering your questions would not get me in any kind of trouble?” This sentiment was felt by some of the interviewees who were concerned about their legal vulnerability working in an illegal enterprise and some who were concerned about Child Protective Services (CPS) removing children from their care. Of my interview sample, 87% (n=31) of the interviewees answered questions about their experiences with the police and being arrested. Their distrust of an outsider and fear of law enforcement is not unwarranted. Of those respondents, 19% (n=27) had been arrested for sex work, some had been arrested multiple times in multiple counties, while 22% (n=27) had also been arrested for other crimes ranging from shoplifting to drug charges. Twenty-five percent (n=27) of the interviewees suffered sexual, physical, or verbal assaults from police officers (male and female) and 15% (n=27) of interviewees knowingly had clients who were police officers. This overlap between the police, the power of the state that they represent, and the criminalized sex work community will be explored further in the study.

CODING

I utilized the MAXQDA software program to assist my qualitative text analysis. Following the methods of grounded theory, I used open coding, which opens up the data “to all potentials and possibilities contained within them” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.

160), and produced 127 codes. After axial coding, which is “crosscutting or relating concepts to each other” (ibid., p.195), I narrowed the codes to 24, and then narrowed that to three overarching themes: Identity; Family and Friends; Work Conditions/Labor. These final three codes shaped my theorizing about the relevance of previous and emergent sex work discourse; stigma experienced by sex workers; and identity construction within the sex work community.

CONCLUSION

There are various ethical and methodological challenges when attempting to study a criminalized and stigmatized population such as sex workers. However, marrying intersectional theory with grounded theory helps me create an integrative and reflexive framework that constructs an ethically and methodologically sound study. Utilizing intersectional theory allows me to explore the intersectional paradigm that views age, race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class (and many other categories of identity) as mutually constructive, interacting systems of power. Moving these to the center of my analysis highlights their interactions within the sex work community and reveals how these interacting systems influence identity-construction. Pairing intersectional theory with grounded theory, a qualitative method that privileges the voice of the subject, allows me more freedom to gain insight into the lived experience of the interviewees.

Using overt participant observation, a demographic survey, interview questions and follow-up interviews helps corroborate evidence for the conclusions that I have drawn. These different methods played different roles in creating an integration of the data that was further corroborated by coding. All of this, ultimately, aided me in my theoretical constructions.

Chapter 3

A HISTORY OF SEX WORK AND SEXUALITY IN SAN FRANCISCO

It's 10:00pm on a Friday night. The air is cool as pedestrian traffic picks up, and the city fills with roaming homeless, hustlers, couples exiting restaurants after dinner, lone men standing on corners, and groups of young people entering bars and clubs. Standing in front of Harem,⁴³ a popular drag bar in the heart of the Tenderloin district in San Francisco, two transgender women are outside making eye contact with each passing car. One is tall and Hispanic wearing a shoulder-length blonde wig, heavy makeup, long false eye lashes and deep red lips. She is wearing a yellow V-neck shirt with rhinestones around the V, a black fitted blazer, tight black leggings, and white stiletto shoes. The other woman is Asian, with long, straight, black hair and is very tall with broad shoulders, beautiful dark eyes, and a hard stare. She is dressed in a bright blue blouse and a fitted blazer, with shiny black leggings and tall, black platform heels. The blonde leans against a light post, and the raven haired woman smokes a cigarette. A black car passes slowly and a window is rolled down. The black haired woman walks up to the car and leans in to say something as her blonde friend walks toward the liquor store next to the club.⁴⁴

As this scene outside of Harem indicates, although sex work in San Francisco is not legal, it is a booming, and in many ways public, business. Yet, to fully understand the current climate for sex work, it is important to acknowledge the long and complex history of sex work and sexuality in San Francisco, how the two are intertwined, and how that history influences sex workers in San Francisco today.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the expansion of San Francisco from a small farming town to a diverse city-center and examines how the nearly all-male population influenced the development of the city. This chapter examines the history of prostitution in San Francisco beginning with the gold rush and explores how the laws surrounding prostitution, which were often highly raced, gendered, and classed, changed over the course of 160 years. Next, it will examine the history and interconnectedness of prostitution and the public emergence of “non-normative” sexualities within San

⁴³ This name has been changed.

⁴⁴ K. Read, field notes, October, 15, 2012.

Francisco. Finally, this chapter will discuss the social climate, culture, and demographics of San Francisco today. This analysis situates San Francisco within the larger history of sex work and sexuality discourses discussed in Chapter 1. This chapter also argues that while some aspects of prostitution in San Francisco seemingly paralleled that of other major cities, San Francisco's distinct history, geography, and demographics have created a particularly unique climate for the counterpublic of sex workers that greatly inform the results of this study.

THE GOLD RUSH ENTREPRENEURS

The expansion of San Francisco into a city-center was almost entirely due to the gold rush. Many explorers in the 16th and 17th centuries were aware of what was eventually called the port of San Francisco and used it frequently, but due to fog cover, none had traveled into the bay to see the actual bay of San Francisco. It was not until 1769 that the San Francisco Bay was discovered by a small group of Franciscan holy men traveling on foot (Hittell, 1897). Several years later, they established a mission named for their patron saint, St. Francis. "The mission itself of San Francisco was only founded in 1776, though it had been projected ever since the discovery of the bay, about the end of October, 1769" (Soule, Gihon & Nisbet, 1855, p. 46). Soon, settlers followed and the holy men focused on the religious conversion of the Native American population, the Miwoks. For approximately 80 years, San Francisco was an obscure agricultural frontier with about 400 settlers.⁴⁵ But the gold rush of 1849 would change that entirely with a sudden population boom (Holliday, 1981, p. 26).

⁴⁵ "On July 28, 1847, in San Francisco's first newspaper, the California Star, Sam Brennan published the young community's population figures: 459 residents, among them 138 females, includes 66 white women over the age of twenty, 8 Indian women, 1 Sandwich Islander, and 1 Negro" (Levy, 1990, p. xix).

San Francisco's population expansion was rapid, completely changing the demographic of the area. In the brief seven years from 1845 to 1852, the population exploded to 34,000 people—by 1862, the population was a staggering 50,000 (Wonderling, 2008, p. 5). This increase in the population was the result of (almost exclusively) men heading to California for the gold rush. The first wave of gold seekers arrived by ship to San Francisco in 1848, along with another type of entrepreneur: Mexican and Latin American professional prostitutes, the earliest to arrive in San Francisco (p. 40). For men and women of all ethnicities and classes, San Francisco held the potential for economic success and social mobility, thus people flooded to northern California.

Officially, the gold rush began in 1849, and with an open immigration policy (Yung, 1999, p. 10) that would not be challenged until the Page Act in 1875, men of all nationalities poured into the city. Because most men expected hardships both during the journey to San Francisco and in the actual camps, many left their families behind. Yet, while the gold rush is often framed as a male-dominant pilgrimage, “thousands of women decided that where men could go, they could go. Some women came alone, many more with husbands, fathers, brothers. Some came for the gold, to make their ‘pile.’ Some came to stay. How many women participated in the gold rush cannot be known” (Levy, 1990, p. xxii). While some women chose to head west, historical documents verify that the majority of travelers and settlers were indeed men and the mining camps were overwhelmingly male, with some men setting up alternative domestic quarters. Some households had men working together cooperatively with “two to five men who constituted an economic unit: they worked together in placer claims held by household

members, alternating tasks and placing the gold in a common fund from which they purchased food and other necessities” (Johnson, 2000, p. 6).

Most gold seekers were young men—specifically adult males under forty years of age (Barnhart, 1986, p. 16), and the majority of men in San Francisco between 1850 and 1860 were foreign born. The first wave of gold miners came from Chile and Peru—two South American port cities with a history of gold mining and long established trade



Figure 3: A group of Barbary Coast prostitutes and their madam (on the left). Photo courtesy the San Francisco History Center at the San Francisco Public Library.

relations with San Francisco (N.A. Boyd, 2003, p. 4; Levy, 1990, p. 151). Historical research claims that some prostitutes “took advantage of the loneliness of the men, the financial rewards, and above all, of the suspension of social and moral restraints” (Barnhart, 1986, p. 17), but there is also evidence that, due to the overall scarcity of

women, even “decent” women were able to earn very good livings as cooks, seamstresses, and washerwomen (Levy, 1990, p. 91-107).

Some historians argue that the “overlap of cultures and communities, both foreign and native born, contributed to a live-and-let-live sensibility” (N.A. Boyd, 2003, p. 4) which was also being experienced in other major city-centers. For example, in New York and Chicago, prostitution was also becoming a steady public business. “By the mid-nineteenth century, a wide variety of commercial sexual activity existed in the largest American cities...Urban sexuality was increasingly expressed and restricted to appeal to a male consumer world of entertainment, goods, newspapers, and advertisements” (Gilfoyle, 1992, p. 18). San Francisco was unique, however, because of the skewed gender ratio and sudden (and sometimes immediate) wealth that many miners experienced, meaning they had the desire to purchase sex and the means to do so. Additionally, because of simple supply and demand, many prostitutes were able to charge higher rates, remain in demand, and achieve financial success. However, there was class stratification among prostitutes, and historical data indicates a wide disparity in income based on clientele, age, appearance, race or ethnicity, health, venue and other factors (Johnson, 2000; Gilfoyle, 1992; Rutter, 2005; Sides, 2009).

Yet, women’s economic opportunities, specifically in prostitution, paralleled men’s opportunities in other frontier occupations that were not necessarily open to women in other U.S. cities. And, like many of the men, some prostitutes tried to go into business for themselves by becoming madams or running gambling saloons or barrooms. Some women had been prostitutes in other places and had migrated to San Francisco for the financial opportunities while others became prostitutes because of unexpected

financial need. Being a prostitute meant the hope of economic mobility, social status, and for many women, financial independence. Because San Francisco was still a very new, wide-open town, it was a unique space where:

the opportunities for upward mobility among professional prostitutes were remarkably similar to those that the men enjoyed in other professions. There was no traditional merchant class to close ranks against a newcomer—everyone was a newcomer; there was no professional organization from which an outsider had to gain acceptance; and there was no organized red-light district. (Barnhart, 1986, p. 16)

With such moral plasticity, women could work as prostitutes without fear of arrest and could even gain social status. Some historians suggest that the few women that could bear the hardships of frontier life, many of whom were prostitutes, were well respected:

“During the Gold Rush, prostitutes were welcome in ‘polite society’—they socialized at masquerade balls, and in theaters men remained standing until the painted ladies were seated” (N.A. Boyd, 2003, p. 40).⁴⁶ However, this respect was often predicated upon a woman’s class and race or ethnicity with overt racism framing women of color as shameful vectors of disease that lacked any respectability. As one journal entry notes:

The Mexicans and Chileans, like the people of negro descent, were only of the commonest description. The women of all these various races were nearly all of the vilest character, and openly practiced the most shameful commerce. The

⁴⁶ It should be noted that some historians believe that “Any woman who could disport herself respectably was treated with utmost esteem simply because she was female. Many European and American prostitutes enjoyed the open admiration of men, even the façade of respect” (Levy, 1990, p. 151). Here, Levy makes it clear that any respect shown to white women, even prostitutes, was a façade, though she does not clarify if the façade is based on their occupation or on their gender.

lewdness of fallen white females is shocking enough to witness, but it is far exceeded by the disgusting practices of these tawny visage creatures. (qtd. in Levy, 1990, p. 151)

During this particular time in history, the acceptance of prostitution, though under the umbrella of racism, was experienced by other “working girls” in city centers throughout the country, to an extent (Blair, 2010). New York’s Five Points, for example, was an area known for prostitution and vice, and was also the most racially integrated milieu in antebellum New York with frequent open and commercial displays of inter-racial commerce with women of all races selling sexual services to men though these displays “did not pass without some controversy” (Gilfoyle, 1997, p. 41-42). Because of San Francisco’s ethnic and racial diversity, unique gender ratio, and the entrepreneurial mania that had enveloped the city, historians agree that there seemed to be an overall climate of acceptance toward prostitutes.

Additionally, San Francisco was geographically situated for expansion, mercantilism, and diverse sexual encounters. Because San Francisco had the best port in California, the cargo ships that served the west coast docked there, becoming home base for thousands of men as they headed toward the mines.⁴⁷ These miners could purchase their tools and provisions from a growing merchant class and their intimacy from the growing number of prostitutes. Additionally, this meant that San Francisco sustained large transient populations that were less likely to conform to social rules and regulations

⁴⁷ The port of San Francisco has a long history as the “best port” on what is now the West Coast of the United States. “The first mention made of the port of San Francisco seems to have been...in the year 1595...The port...was the only safe place of anchorage...It was there that Drake had found refuge from the northern winds that careened his ship. It was there also, as near as can now be ascertained, that Viscaino anchored in 1603” (Hittell, 1897, p. 380-381).

(N.A. Boyd, 2003, p. 27). The city itself was designed with one-room boarding houses, saloons, and gambling houses that reflected a bachelor existence and mentality (D. Boyd, 2006; Sides, 2009). With such a diverse and transient population, prostitution afforded the miners (and prostitutes) opportunities to experience sexual encounters with others from a variety of backgrounds: “in addition to patronizing American prostitutes, miners could easily find Chilean, Chinese, Mexican, and particularly French ones—who outnumbered all others by most accounts—to fulfill their sexual desires” (Sides, 2009, p. 17).

With the construction of a “bachelor” city that included a large number of gambling saloons, parlor houses, and dance halls, sexual behavior was no longer a strictly private matter. Sex was overtly commercialized and moved from the private sphere, where it had been in rural communities, to the public sphere in this city-center. Suddenly, men could frequent spaces where the commodification of sex was a public and unconcealed event.

RACE & ETHNICITY IN EARLY SAN FRANCISCO

As with any occupation, there was a broad range of positive and negative experiences of prostitution, often based on a woman’s age, race or ethnicity, and where she worked. Parlor houses and brothels were initially the most popular places for women to work; unfortunately, later, “with the organization of prostitution into an exploitive and profitable business, ‘crib yards’ became popular in [what eventually became] the city’s red-light district. These houses were crowded and unsanitary and often women worked in cribs as small as five by seven feet” (N.A. Boyd, 2003, p. 40).

The miners were of various backgrounds themselves. As Susan Lee Johnson (2000) asserts, California gold rush migration was global, but selective:

Chileans went; Argentineans and Brazilians, for the most part, did not. Cantonese speakers from South China went; people from Shanghai and Nanjing did not.

African Americans, both enslaved and free, went; Africans did not. France sent many forty-niners; Spain, hardly any. Men immigrated in droves; women, in comparatively small numbers. (p. 58)

Johnson argues that men and women immigrated “from very particular places at very particular times” depending on their political climates and capitalist market economies that linked many people, products, and places to each other in their pursuit of wealth. For example, Mexico and Chile sent more immigrants north to California than other Latin American nations because both were in the throes of political, economic, and social change that followed their declarations of independence from Spain earlier in the century. With the French Revolution of 1848, many French, including French prostitutes, headed for America, and the African Americans fled west to escape southern slavery and the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. Thus, immigration to northern California was a result of not just the discovery of gold, but also of “the momentous local and global forces that worked together to bring sixty or seventy thousand immigrants in less than a decade to an area” (Johnson, 2000, p. 58-59). However, it was not long before racial and ethnic tensions arose and a foreign miners’ tax was approved on April 13, 1850. Officially called “An Act for better regulation of the Mines and the government of foreign miners,” it charged non-native born miners \$20 per month (ibid., p. 201-211). While this new tax

indicated an overt ethnocentrism for nearly all of the immigrant gold miners, it was the Chinese who perhaps bore the most ethnic discrimination.

Chinese men worked on California Pacific Railway when the other (mostly Italian and Irish) laborers went on strike, demanding higher wages. Despite “the slave-like conditions” (Kitch, 2009, p. 196), the Chinese proved to be consistent and hardy workers who were sick less often (partially because they boiled the water for their tea) and worked very efficiently. Additionally, Chinese immigrants were easier to exploit: “California businessmen hired Chinese men to work longer hours than white workers for less than half they pay” (p. 196). Their work ethic and their “co-optation” of the railway jobs led to an anti-immigrant sentiment that resulted in lynching and extended to Chinese women when they immigrated to California.⁴⁸

As time progressed, more Chinese women arrived by the (literal) boatload. “In 1852, there were nearly 12,000 Chinese men in California and a half-dozen Chinese women. Less than twenty years later, there were almost 65,000 men and nearly 5,000 women—among the latter, almost all were prostitutes” (Rutter, 2005, p. 51). Many Chinese arriving to San Francisco were very young girls, sold by their parents either in hope for a better life or simply out of financial need. Many of the young girls were sent off to work in brothels that had previously purchased them or they were stripped and auctioned off on the dock or in the alleyways of Chinatown (Rutter, 2005; Levy, 1990; Barnhart, 1986). Prostitution was so rampant among the Chinese that in 1870 census

⁴⁸ Chinese men were often accused of lust toward white women and underage girls. Newspaper reports from San Francisco to New York alleged that they enticed girls with opium to perform sexually in their dens. Chinese men conversing with white women were enough to stir suspicions of illegal trafficking in prostitution, and this gendered and raced villainizing of Chinese men sometimes ended in murder: “Twenty-nine [Chinese men] were lynched in California after 1850, not counting those killed in a massacre in 1871” (Kitch, 2009, p. 98-99).

manuscripts, 61 percent of the 3,536 Chinese women in California had their occupations listed as “prostitution” (Takaki, 1989). Yet, around this time, the wild-west atmosphere of San Francisco was beginning to be tamed. Not everyone was impressed by the loose morality of what had now become a bustling city, and religious and political figures had emerged and began to work toward regulating prostitution.

In 1895, Donaldina Cameron, a Presbyterian missionary from New Zealand, crusaded against Chinese “slavery,” “inculcated Chinese prostitutes with Christian principles and Victorian habits, and selected proper partners—Christian Chinese men—for them to marry” (Sides, 2009, p. 20). Yet it was the passing of the Page Act of 1875 that officially prohibited the importation of Chinese prostitutes and “lewd women,” and the Chinese Exclusion act in 1882 which prohibited the importation of Chinese laborers or their wives for ten year period that greatly affected the immigration and importation of Chinese female prostitutes (Kitch, 2009, p. 197). These laws were both sexist and racist in their nature and had an important impact in framing the Chinese as exotic and morally corrupt.

REGULATION, NOT ELIMINATION

Notably, many of those who campaigned against female prostitution, both in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, sought to *regulate* the trade rather than eliminate it and this idea was paralleled in other cities such as Chicago, Washington D.C., and New York:

John Warren, a New York City officer for 30 years, reflected a common view among police when he described prostitution as "a crime against the state" which "cannot be wholly eradicated." For the good of society, however, it had to be

regulated by law, and this could be done most effectively if the practice was confined to specific districts. Several other New York police told the 1875 Assembly Committee on Crime "that as houses of ill-repute could not be suppressed, they should be licensed." Thomas Hollinberger, a District of Columbia Police Captain, testified before the Illinois Vice Commission that he favored segregation because repression could not be accomplished. (Shumsky, 1986, p. 668).⁴⁹

An additional motive of the police for advocating for segregation into "red-light districts" was the hope that it would make their job easier. Criminals, they thought, would flock to the crime-ridden district where the police could then arrest them with the aid of prostitutes acting as stool pigeons (ibid). Around this same time, in Great Britain, "Parliament passed the first of three statutes providing for the sanitary inspection of prostitutes in specific military depots in southern England and Ireland in 1864" (Walkowitz, 1983, p. 421). Such regulatory practices allowed prostitutes to keep working in specific circumstances, yet classed them as criminals and vectors of disease while "ghettoizing" them. By attempting to contain prostitutes with other criminals, the racially and economically privileged regulators were also attempting to protect the notion of middle-class respectability that they were trying to instate in San Francisco.

Another impetus for the regulation of prostitution, rather than the elimination of it, was the fear that if men did not have easy access to women, they would "turn" to each other to fulfill sexual desires (Kaye, 2004, p. 4). Research on same-sex desire and sexual contact in mining camps in the Pacific Northwest indicates that "[b]y the 1850s, the

⁴⁹ As noted in Chapter 1, various discourse such as this have produced stereotypes of "the prostitute" and have changed over time.

mostly male town of San Francisco had hosted a staggering number of saloons, a dizzying array of erotic performances and prostitutes, and a few homosexual men and women” (Sides, 2008, p. 16). Situational homosexuality⁵⁰ became a concern for the religious and political figures of the time who felt that “the sexual milieu of the camps was further complicated by the disproportionate gender ratio of the camps’ populations, which created opportunities for an easier expression of same-sex desire than miners found in conventional society” (ibid. p. 17).

The subtext of homosexuality soon became a more public form of erotic entertainment. By the turn of the 20th century, if not earlier, Pacific Street venues in San Francisco featured female impersonators who performed dances and sexual favors. Specifically, a dance hall and saloon called the Dash had “female impersonators [who] entertained customers and homosexual sex could be purchased in booths for a dollar” (N.A. Boyd, 2003, p. 25). There was enough cross-dressing in the Barbary Coast to alarm the Board of Supervisors, which added an ordinance to the Health Code in 1903 forbidding anyone “to appear on ‘any public highway’ in clothing ‘not belonging to or usually worn by his or her sex’” (qtd. in Sides, 2008, p. 20). During this same time period, the rising female population began to diminish the market for prostitution and erotic dancing. With the increase in “respectable” middle-class women who represented and often campaigned for virtue and temperance, in addition to the emerging political and religious leaders, strict ideas about the rigidity of gender expression and sexuality emerged, the 1906 earthquake would afford them a fresh canvas to do so.

⁵⁰ “Situational homosexuality” refers to sexual activity between partners of the same sex that occurs in single-sex environments and not as part of a gay lifestyle. Common single-sex environments with documented situational homosexuality are prisons, military bases, mining camps, convents and monasteries, and boarding schools.

The great 1906 earthquake of San Francisco was a pivotal moment in the trajectory of the city. The earthquake spawned an equally devastating fire, and by the time the smoke and rubble were cleared, the city of San Francisco had been leveled. In the ensuing year, many business and political figures would also be leveled by a graft and bribery prosecution. “Abraham Ruef,⁵¹ Mayor Schmitz, all members of the Board of Supervisors, the police chief, as well as corporate officers of PG&E, United Railroads and what would become Pacific Telephone, were indicted for graft and bribery” (Sides, 2008; U.S. Geological Survey, 2011). With the city rebuilding its infrastructure and the corrupt politicians indicted, San Francisco essentially became a clean slate, and some of the financial elite sought to project an image of the city as clean, orderly, morally reputable, and therefore worthy of financial investment. However, many of the politicians and police were reluctant to forfeit the profits of vice and prostitution.

QUEER LIFE & PROSTITUTION⁵²

After rebuilding from the earthquake and fire, San Francisco had become a cosmopolitan port city and was better suited than most of the nation’s cities to provide the access, anonymity, and erotic possibilities that many men desired during this period when notions of gender and sexuality were shifting.⁵³ Because San Francisco was a major port of embarkation for military personnel heading to the Pacific, and debarkation for

⁵¹ Abraham Ruef was a lawyer and politician with close ties to the Mayor.

⁵² I am using the term “queer” to reflect resistance to what Michael Warner classifies as “heteronormativity.” In this way, “queer” functions as an umbrella term that includes gay and lesbian experiences as well as any identity that resists a heteronormative framework. “Heteronormative” refers to the ideology that heterosexuality is the “norm” which leads to cultural bias toward heterosexuality.

⁵³ For example, the 1920s, due to prohibition, suffrage and WWI, women emerged socially in new ways. “Many women were living their lives as, if not men, wholly masculine beings...they passed as men, lived lives as men, and took wives as men” (Halberstam, 1998, p. 87). Emerging urban landscapes, like San Francisco, allowed for more public socializing (away from the family) for (white) men and women, and the ideological definitions of “homosexual behavior” changed as doctors described it as a “condition” that was inherent within a person (D’Emilio, 1993, p. 471).

men dishonorably discharged for homosexual behavior, opportunities for homosexual sociability increased, and the YMCA became a space for gay men to meet each other in a way that had not previously existed in other rural areas or more restricted spaces. During the 1920s and 1930s, in San Francisco, the Embarcadero YMCA became a place of liaisons for men who met on Market Street, which had become a popular place for gay cruising (Sides, 2008, p. 17-30). Later, in the 1940s, “crowded into port cities, men on leave or those waiting to be shipped overseas shared beds in YMCAs and slept in each other’s arms” (D’Emilio, 1986, p. 25). Although the YMCA emerged as a space for gay men’s clandestine exchanges, the Prohibition movement was gaining momentum and even San Francisco could not escape temperance-seekers.

In San Francisco, affluent white women’s participation in social and political activism was strong; they organized to outlaw prostitution, provided aid to the poor, protected child laborers, limited men’s access to alcohol, and gained suffrage rights. Yet, despite these women’s political participation and influence, and the desires of some of the political elite, anti-prostitution and anti-alcohol crusades were not widely popular in San Francisco. City officials, police officers, and business leaders overwhelmingly opposed anti-prostitution and anti-alcohol ordinances (N.A. Boyd, 2003, p. 36-39). The city’s reputation as a “wide-open-town” was built on these vices, and for many, there was simply too much money to be made to bend to the religious will of the Reformation.

In 1933, with the repeal of Prohibition and the emergence of queer entertainments in the city’s tourist-district night clubs, bars, and taverns, the publicly visible queer culture blossomed (N.A. Boyd, 2003, p. 5). Reform activists, rather than elected officials or police, continued the pressure to control prostitution, yet:

the “progressive” impulse to control and, later, criminalize prostitution grew as the numbers of Anglo-American migrants increased, bringing a Protestant based reform agenda to the city...by the turn of the century, the number of women in San Francisco equaled that of men, and elite white women became increasingly important to city politics...linking prostitution to concerns about public health and the spread of venereal disease. (ibid., p. 41)

Shaping the prostitute as a vector of disease would serve as an important rhetorical tool for decades to come, but in the meantime, San Francisco continued to fight reform and remain an epicenter for vice.

Many political leaders and elected officials promised “to *protect* the city’s penchant for vice, and officials regularly teamed up with vice interests to fight moral reform” (N.A. Boyd, 2003, p. 42, my italics,). Not wanting to altogether stop the criminal behavior that much of the city was founded upon (and many of the politicians profited from), some political leaders tried, at least, to control and contain it. In 1911, for example, San Francisco began a system of controlled prostitution where prostitutes were restricted to a single district near the old Barbary Coast and required to register at a city-run health clinic, where they were checked periodically by a medical examiner (N.A. Boyd, 2003; Sides, 2008). This segregation of prostitutes was a tactic used during the latter half of the nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth when some American cities experimented with the informal legalization of prostitution. Women who confined their activities to certain segregated districts, or behind closed doors, were generally left alone. By 1900, nearly every large American city, and many smaller ones, too, possessed a recognized and well-known red-light district where prostitution flourished (Shumsky,

1986, p. 665; Gilfoyle, 1992). Containment seemed to be an acceptable temporary compromise between the reformers and the politicians.

Some representatives of San Francisco's financial elite, municipal government, local law enforcement, and cultural and religious leaders tried to suppress the illegal

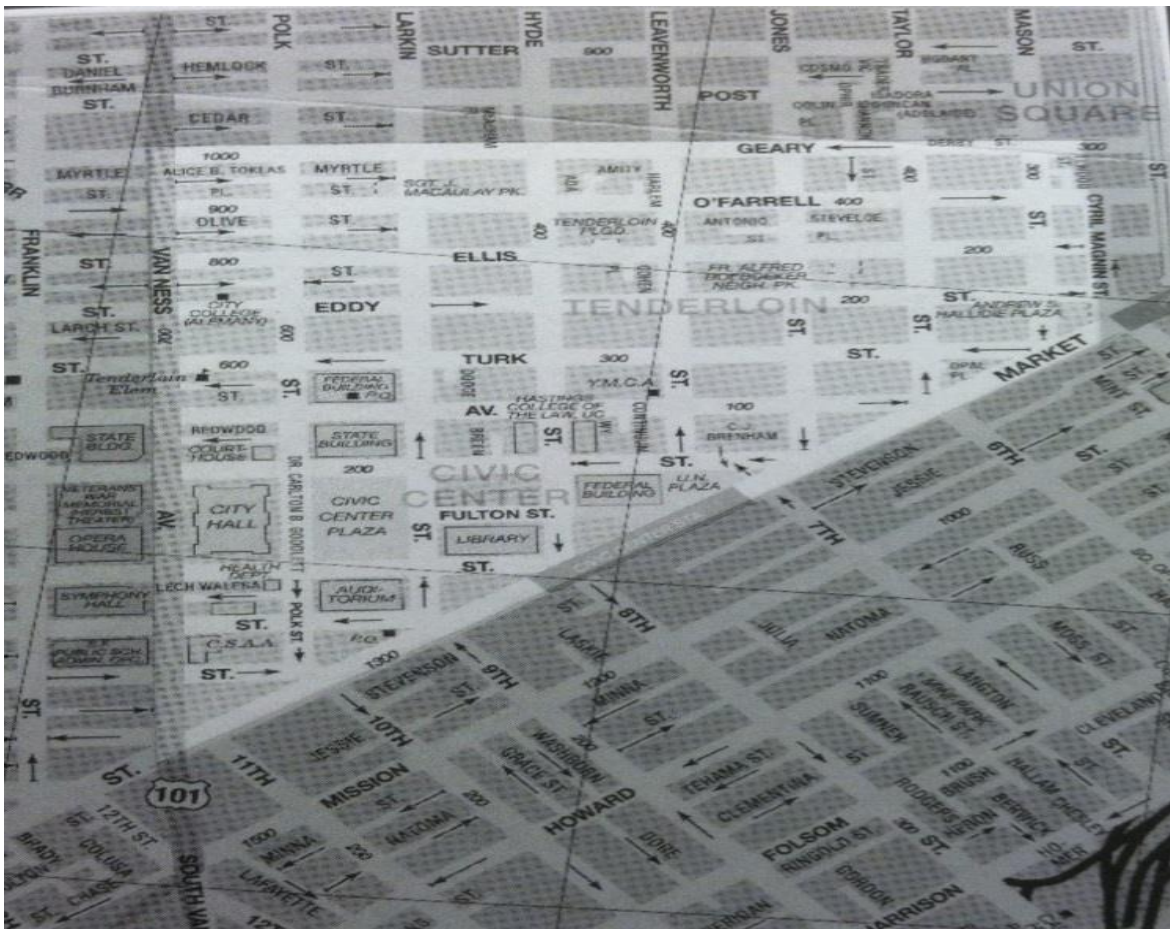


Figure 4: This photo represents what is considered the Tenderloin today (though many San Francisco residents feel that this border varies and that the Tenderloin extends to other streets, such as Mission Street, where the St. James Infirmary is located). This photo is courtesy the book *Erotic City: Sexual Revolutions and the Making of Modern San Francisco* (2008) by Josh Sides.

sexual activities, but when suppression was either impossible or unfeasible, they pursued an aggressive policy of geographic containment by creating the San Francisco Tenderloin. Prior to the 1930s, the openly homosexual population of San Francisco was

small and discreet, but with the birth of the Tenderloin, Market Street, which created one border of the Tenderloin, became a meeting point for “bookies, pickpockets, hustlers, actors, and queens” (Sides, 2008, p. 39). The Tenderloin became a space where all vices and social non-conformity converged.

San Francisco’s Tenderloin overlapped with the district that drag queens and female impersonators occupied. “Homosexual and male prostitutes often worked the stretch of Market Street from the waterfront, where the sailors disembarked, to the Tenderloin, where male prostitutes turned tricks” (N.A. Boyd, 2003, p. 44). This area became a public space where gay male and transgender prostitutes lived, mingled and sold sexual services. For some gay men and women in San Francisco, “the 1920s and 1930s brought a modest easing of their difficulties. There was more open discussion sexuality in sophisticated circles...[and] a small but stable group life was forming (D’Emilio, 1986, p. 22). However, homosexuality and prostitution had become illegal, due in large part to the unrelenting Women’s Christian Temperance Movement, and the tension between the “criminals” of San Francisco and the financial and political elite was growing.

In 1941 Police Chief Dullea closed all of the brothels in the city. This dramatically changed the geography of prostitution because women then moved to bars, taverns, and the streets.⁵⁴ At this same time, many bars and taverns were already occupied by groups of gay men and lesbians. According to N.A. Boyd (2003), these bar scenes acted as part of a larger queer public culture that was a form of informal activism: “bar life can also be seen as ‘political’ in that it opened up the possibility for new modes

⁵⁴ Research indicates that during this time brothels overwhelmingly employed only women as prostitutes.

of social resistance” (p. 13). The bars and taverns for gay and lesbian patrons expressed “a politic of lesbian visibility and queer social resistance in San Francisco that stressed their differences from members of mainstream heterosexual society, rather than their similarities to them” (ibid.), creating a sense of camaraderie and identity. Bars and taverns offered a place for the gay and lesbian communities to publicly meet but were also vulnerable to policing. “In the period between 1942 and 1951, the State Board of Equalization, California’s tax and alcohol control agency, became more vigilant in policing bars and taverns...yet, as [gay and lesbian patrons and bar owners] fought to defend their territory from police intrusion, they came to understand the power of collective action” (ibid., p. 16-17) which would lay the foundation for the lesbian and gay civil rights movement.

In the 1950s, San Francisco gays and lesbians began to organize and to create publicly circulated materials. Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon established Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), a lesbian civil rights organization and San Francisco social club that began publishing *Ladder* the following year (Stein, 2000; D’Emilio, 1986; N.A. Boyd, 2003).⁵⁵ In 1956, ONE, Inc. was founded and published its magazine, *ONE*, intended for a gay constituency. “Writers in *ONE* magazine projected an image of defiant pride in their identity; they intentionally tried to shake their readers out of a resigned status quo” (D’Emilio, 1986, p. 108). Finally, the Mattachine Society was also formed and published the *Mattachine Review*. The *Mattachine Review* “stroved to initiate dialogue...and

⁵⁵ *Ladder* was the DOB’s magazine that, according to John D’Emilio (1986), was consciously aimed at “the lonely isolated lesbians away from the big cities.” D’Emilio notes that although the magazine reported political news, “the women who published the magazine carefully refrained from advocacy and editorializing. Instead, the monthly devoted much of its space to poetry, fiction, history, and biography. It also allowed lesbians to give voice to an experience that society suppressed and distorted” (p. 104).

repeatedly impressed upon their gay constituency the need to adjust to normative standards of proper behavior. By persuading gay men and the importance of conformity and by minimizing the differences between homosexuality and heterosexuality, [Mattachine and DOB] expected to diffuse social hostility as a prelude to changes in law and public policy (D'Emilio, 1986, p.108-109). But these advancements in gay rights and advocacy did not happen in a vacuum; rather, they reverberated out to other major cities. Soon, both the DOB and the Mattachine Society opened chapters in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles.

Gay and lesbian communities were beginning to organize and publish, creating a climate for social dissidence, and it seemed to be working. In 1959, in San Francisco, it was ruled that police could no longer fine bars and taverns that were exclusively patronized by gays and lesbians or arrest their customers because it would be a violation of civil rights.⁵⁶ This decision by the California Supreme Court, *Vallegra v. Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control*, validated and emboldened the gay and lesbian community. “The [gay and lesbian civil rights] movement grew, gained allies, and achieved visibility; while the world of the bars increasingly took on the contours of a self-conscious, cohesive community” (D'Emilio, 1986, p. 177). Some of those allies included male, female, and transgender prostitutes.

In the late 1960s, a construction boom led to the “Manhattanization” of San Francisco, and the economic revolution was paralleled by a social revolution. “San

⁵⁶ It should be noted that this occurred 10 years before the Stonewall riots of 1969 in New York City. The Stonewall riots, which are often referred to as the beginning of the gay rights movement, were a result of a police raid on the Stonewall Inn, in Greenwich Village in New York City, which was a popular bar for gay men, drag queens, and members of the (emerging) transgender community. The initial police raid and ensuing riot then spurred several more protests for gay rights throughout New York City.

Francisco also became the epicenter of the nation's countercultural and sexual revolution...gays and lesbians held hands and kissed in public; prostitutes, panderers, and pornographers flooded the streets...and a few free lovers literally danced naked in the street" (Sides, 2009, p. 4-5). The burgeoning "beat" movement of San Francisco's North Beach gained national media attention and North Beach writers, poets, and artists suddenly became representative of "a nationwide generational rebellion against the values of the middle class" (D'Emilio, 1986, p. 178) championing the "free love" movement. In the 1960's media, as the rhetoric about the "problem" of homosexuals in America grew, and "San Francisco stood out as uncommonly queer" (N.A. Boyd, 2003, p. 200). In the 1960s and early 70s there was a revival of commercial sexual entertainment, predominantly in the North Beach district. There were thirty-nine adult movie theaters, fourteen "encounter studios"—where patrons paid to converse with nude women and/or engage in sexual services, and dozens of peep shows, strip clubs, and massage parlors where sexual contact was encouraged (Sides, 2008, p. 48). According to N.A. Boyd (2003), an article in *Life* magazine about the "problem" of homosexuality in America, identified San Francisco as the "gay capital" in part because "there are more than 30 bars that cater exclusively to a homosexual clientele" (p. 200). By the early 1970s, San Francisco was increasingly identified as a national haven for vice and, specifically, prostitution. In January 1971, a journalist for the *New York Times Magazine* wrote a scathing article about San Francisco entitled "The Porn Capital of America." In this article he discusses how, in San Francisco, "prostitution is flourishing" (qtd. in Sides, 2008, p. 60). According to the San Francisco Committee on Crime, a non-partisan analysis group, the "range of prostitution in this city is fantastic":

Practitioners may be male or female; black, white, or oriental. They may be 14-year-olds hustling as part of a junior high school ‘syndicate’ operation; they may be hippies supporting the habits of their ‘old man’ (or their own habits); they may be moonlighting secretaries who sell their favors on a selective basis through legitimate dating services. Places of assignation range from run-down hotels to luxurious hilltop apartments. (ibid.)

Arguably, the proliferation of pornography in San Francisco in the 1970s was essentially the product of changing values among young Americans and increasingly liberal Supreme Court decisions, and cheaper 8-millimeter film replaced 16-millimeter film (ibid.). Yet, prostitution remained illegal and stigmatized, causing many sex workers of all genders and ethnicities to work in overtly dangerous conditions and when assaulted, left feeling that they had no recourse. Additionally, during this time, prostitutes were being targeted by police and vice operations, but their clients, many of whom were high ranking public officials, were not arrested (D. Boyd, 2006, p. 52). It was during this time that a young woman named Margaret Jean St. James who worked at Pierre’s, a North Beach bar that catered to locals, was beginning to intimately understand how the financial and political elite of San Francisco mingled with the North Beach underground without fear of arrest or citation.

MARGO ST. JAMES AND SEX WORKERS’ RIGHTS

Margaret Jean St. James was born in Bellingham, Washington in 1937 and moved to San Francisco to become an artist in 1958 when she was 21 years old. Upon arriving in San Francisco, she became a cocktail waitress who mingled with the beatniks, the “night” crowd, and a number of hustlers and prostitutes. In 1962, as part of a sting operation, she

was arrested for keeping a “disorderly house” (i.e., a brothel). She vehemently denied being a prostitute or a madam, but in 1963 she was tried and convicted. Determined to overturn the ruling, she enrolled in law school with the sole goal of appealing the courts’ decision (M. St. James, personal communication, March 28, 2012).

During her time in law school, St. James began serving subpoenas and clerking for various bail bondsmen. Through this work, she began to meet judges and city officials and got first-hand exposure to the state’s punitive action against prostitutes and the blind-eye policy toward their clients (D. Boyd, 2006, p. 49-50). Socially, this was also the time of a number of mass social movements including protests for civil rights, women’s rights, anti-war demonstrations, “free love,” and the counterculture. St. James aligned herself with the ideologies and tactics of the mass movements of the 1960s and saw the power of collective change. Her experience socializing with both the San Francisco underground and some of the most economically privileged and politically powerful (along with her own arrest and conviction), in conjunction with the social activism of the 1960s, formed the foundation of what would become her long career as an activist for sex worker rights (M. St. James, personal communication, March 28, 2012).

In 1973, St. James established the first advocacy and social service organization for prostitute rights’: COYOTE (Call off Your Old Tired Ethics). The first headquarters for COYOTE was located at Pier 40 on the Embarcadero, but these offices were burned down under suspicious circumstances in 1978. The purpose of COYOTE was (and remains):

to work for the rights of all sex workers: strippers, phone operators, prostitutes, porn actresses etc. of all genders and persuasions. COYOTE supports programs to

assist sex workers in their choice to change their occupation, works to prevent the scapegoating of sex workers for STDs, and to educate sex workers, their clients and the general public about safe sex. (BAYSWAN, 2004)

COYOTE would become a national model for sex worker rights' advocates and would eventually expand to an additional office in Los Angeles.⁵⁷

To raise money for COYOTE and eventually for St. James Infirmary, “the only full-spectrum health clinic run by sex workers for sex workers” (Akers & Evans, 2010, p. 7), St. James hosted the annual Hooker’s Ball beginning in 1974. The Hooker’s Ball became a thing of legend and was well attended by the political and financial elite and some celebrities including Shell Silverstein (Sausalito resident, children’s book author, and musician) who wrote a song for the occasion entitled “Everybody Needs a Hooker Once in Awhile [sic],” and Jane Fonda (D. Boyd, 2006, p. 52-53). Money raised at the Hooker’s Ball eventually helped to fund the St. James Infirmary which created a peer-based model for sex worker organizations. Later, sex-positive feminists would argue in favor of this model, stating that “organizations likely to have the greatest impact [on sex workers] are those that seek to empower prostitute women to make decisions about their lives, and give them the skills to do so, without making judgment—moral or otherwise—about the work they do” (Alexander, 1998, p. 199). Eventually, this model would expand beyond serving “prostitute women” to include men and transgender sex workers as well.

The 1970s appeared to be a time when both prostitutes and the gay and lesbian communities were gaining a political voice. In May 1975, the state of California repealed

⁵⁷ Other sex worker rights' advocacy groups and resource centers emerged following COYOTE's model, including: Sex Workers Action Coalition (SWAC); North American Task Force on Prostitution (NATFP); Hooking Is Real Employment (HIRE); Prostitutes of New York (PONY); The International Committee for Prostitution Rights (ICPR); California Prevention and Education Project (CAL-PEP).

its 103-year-old sodomy law, increasing civil rights for gay males (Cochrane, 2004, p. 22).⁵⁸ Additionally, in 1975 George Moscone became mayor and sought the informal decriminalization of prostitution in the city. He appointed Charles Gain, of the Oakland Police Department, to the position of chief of police. Gain broadcast his tolerance for prostitution by befriending the city's best known prostitution rights' advocate: Margo St. James. Joseph Freitas was elected as district attorney and in January 1976 declared that the district attorney's office would no longer actively pursue prostitution convictions. Convinced that prostitution was a victimless crime, Freitas, Gain, and Moscone believed they should direct their resources toward violent crimes, and the results of this new tolerance became publicly visible. By 1976, there was a nightly average of 250 female street-based sex workers in San Francisco, (Sides, 2008, p. 60-61), and the *San Francisco Chronicle* described this as a new 'Gold Rush' in the Tenderloin. During this time, there was also an enormous expansion of African American prostitutes, particularly in the heart of the African American Western Addition, on Fillmore Street (ibid., p. 61).

Because of the civil rights movement, the black population began to have access to more public spaces and job opportunities. Unfortunately, even in a liberal city such as San Francisco, racial discrimination was rampant. "Black men were twice as likely as whites to be unemployed, and where blacks were employed, they tended to work in the lowest paying jobs, largely because of the rampant discrimination in labor unions" (Sides, 2008, p. 61). There were also highly racialized arrests among black pimps and prostitutes. As late as 1979, the San Francisco Police Department (SFPD) was 85% white and 95%

⁵⁸ While most sodomy laws ban contact between a person's mouth and another person's anus or sexual organs, some sodomy laws also ban "crimes against nature" and/or bestiality. "Homosexuality" was often included in the definition of a crime against nature. The California repeal targeted "consensual sodomy between adults," thus it was seen as a "win" for gay males (Goodman, 2001).

male, comprised mostly of San Franciscan-born Irishmen, so while male, female, and transgender prostitutes seemed to have a reprieve from legal repercussions of their trade, racism and homophobia among the police force was widespread, particularly when it came to the fear of disease.

In the late 1970s, in cities such as Chicago, New York, and San Francisco, there was a sudden rash of young men who were developing disturbing medical symptoms that seemed inexplicable, including large purple lesions on their bodies and pneumonia (Cochrane, 2004; Andrews, 1996). San Francisco was enormously affected by the AIDS epidemic in the early 1980s which devastated the gay community, dampening any remaining “free love” vibe of the 1960s and 1970s. As the medical community grappled with understanding HIV/AIDS, many gay men, some of whom participated in sex work, were losing the physical battle. According to one study conducted in 1983, sexual behaviors among gay men began to dramatically change: “men in non-monogamous relationships and men not in relationships reported substantial reductions in high-risk sexual activity, but not a corresponding increase in low-risk sexual behavior” (McKusick, Horstman, & Coates, 1984, p. 493)—many gay men were feeling terrified of sex. While this fear affected gay men’s social and sexual habits, it also had material and economic consequences for gay male sex workers and encouraged an entire new field of study about male sex work. As Dave Altman (1999) suggests, without the HIV/AIDS epidemic, most of the international research about male sex workers is unlikely to have occurred. Gradually, policy makers began to acknowledge male sex work, though historically, “there has been little serious academic recognition of the male sex worker, and what there is has often been overlain with a portentous mix of moralism and voyeurism” (p. xiii).

The AIDS epidemic, and specifically its impact on San Francisco, made political organizing among queer communities and prostitutes a critical priority.

By the 1990s, “the urban landscape of San Francisco had changed dramatically due to the specter of AIDS, [and there was an] explosion in consumption of home video and Internet pornography” (Sides, 2008, p. 9). During this time, lesbian and bisexual women initiated a new revolution: “Skeptical about the rigid politics of the lesbian pioneers of the 1970s, knowledgeable about safe sex practices, and less affected by AIDS than gay men, lesbians in San Francisco created a second sexual revolution, occupying new neighborhoods, opening new businesses, publishing new magazines, and sometimes having group sex in sex clubs” (ibid.). By doing this, they expanded the scope of acceptable female sexual practices and challenged traditional notions of womanhood that would influence women throughout the city.

For example, “[b]eginning in the early 1990s, erotic dancers began organizing themselves and, in some cases, trying to affiliate with trade unions to engage in collective bargaining for better working conditions” (Alexander, 1998, p. 222). On August 30, 1996, the Lusty Lady Theater in San Francisco successfully joined the Local 790 of the SEIU (Service Employees International Union) becoming the first and only exotic dance club to successfully unionize in the United States (Brooks, 2001, p. 59). The Lusty became an international model for sex worker rights and unionizing strategies.

The 1990s also saw the San Francisco Prostitution Task Force emerge, established by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. In 1993, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors consisted of several civil rights attorneys whose focus was in anti-discrimination law, including Terence Hallinan, a long-time advocate for the

decriminalization of prostitution. It was Hallinan who introduced the idea of the Task Force to determine a better understanding of the reality of sex work in San Francisco. The Task Force consisted of:

twenty-eight members who shall represent a broad cross section of San Francisco with regard to race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, age, socioeconomic status and sexual orientation...to do a comparative study of current prostitution laws and regulations in other cities in the United States and internationally...and to explore all options for reform on prostitution laws, social services and law enforcement practices in San Francisco. (BAYSWAN, 1996)

The Task Force was charged with investigating prostitution patterns and practices in San Francisco, as well as current social and legal responses. Additionally, it was to recommend social and legal reforms which would best respond to the city's needs while using city resources more efficiently. The task force members included representatives from the mayor's office, neighborhood groups, law enforcement agencies, public health agencies, social service agencies, city departments and commissions, women's rights advocates and immigrant and prostitute rights groups (BAYSWAN, 1996).⁵⁹ When the Task Force completed its one-and-a-half year study in 1996, they ultimately recommended the decriminalization of prostitution as a way of increasing sex worker safety and decreasing the resources put toward the pursuit of indicting sex workers. This recommendation would play a pivotal role in the emergence of Proposition Q in 2004 and Proposition K in 2008.

SAN FRANCISCO'S PROP. K

⁵⁹ Margo St. James was also a member of the Task Force.

Early in the 21st century, propositions to decriminalize prostitution in the Bay Area began to emerge as a result of the findings of the San Francisco Prostitution Task Force and as a result of an active sex workers' rights movement led by the Sex Workers Outreach Project (SWOP), whose Bay Area chapter was founded in 2003. Proposition Q, a measure to decriminalize prostitution in Berkeley, California was defeated in 2004. Proposition K was on the November 2008 ballot in San Francisco and called for "changing the enforcement of laws related to prostitution and sex workers in the city of San Francisco." The proposition asked voters:

Shall the City: stop enforcing laws against prostitution; stop funding or supporting the First Offender Prostitution Program or any similar anti-prostitution program; enforce existing criminal laws that prohibit crimes such as battery, extortion and rape, regardless of the victim's status as a sex worker; and fully disclose the investigation and prosecution of violent crimes against sex workers?

According to the *San Francisco Chronicle* (2008), supporters of the proposition included the Erotic Service Providers Union,⁶⁰ San Francisco Democratic Party, Harvey Milk Democratic Club, and the La Raza Centro Legal. Similar to Berkeley's Proposition Q, they argued that the proposition would improve safety for sex workers, reduce sexually transmitted diseases, and save the city millions of dollars spent annually on prosecuting prostitution while still requiring enforcement of laws against sexual assault, coercion and other crimes.

⁶⁰ The Erotic Service Providers' Union (ESPU) "seeks to gain agency on behalf of all erotic service providers regarding our occupational, social, and economic rights through affiliating with organized labor." While ESPU serves as an active political voice and resource for sex workers, they are not a traditional labor union such as the Local 790 SEIU.

Opponents of the proposition included then-Mayor Gavin Newsom, District Attorney Kamala Harris, and the Alice B. Toklas LGBT Democratic Club who argued that if the proposition passed, human trafficking would run unchecked, leaving women and children in sexual bondage, while crimes such as drug dealing, assaults and robbery would surge in neighborhoods. They argued that this proposition would turn San Francisco into a safe-haven for sex traffickers and pimps, creating more violence and other crimes, hampering trafficking investigations and damaging quality of life in neighborhoods (Coté, 2008, p. B2). The proposition did not pass, but the margin by which it lost, 41% to 59%, was telling. While the majority of San Franciscans may continue to oppose decriminalization, the social and political engagement of sex worker rights activists had made an impact on the city's residents.

SAN FRANCISCO TODAY

Though much has changed in San Francisco today from 160 years ago when the Gold Rush first began, some things remain the same. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, today, San Francisco is a bustling urban center with a 2010 population of over 800,000 people. The median age of city residents is 38.5 —making it (still) a relatively “young” city and it remains racially and ethnically diverse. The majority of the population (48.5%) is white and the second greatest majority population is Asian (33.3%) with a large Asian majority of Chinese (21.4%), due in part to the number of Chinese immigrants who arrived in the mid-nineteenth century. With less than half of the population being white, there is a great deal of diversity within the city, and it is, in fact, one of the most diverse cities in America with a diversity index of 72.4 (CNBC, 2011). In terms of sex work, this means that there is a wide range of ethnic diversity within the sex

trade, and many sex workers often experience racial or ethnic discrimination by clients and police.

Additionally, San Francisco is a highly educated city. According to the 2012 United States government census, over 51% of San Franciscans who are 25 or older have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to only 23% of people over 25 in the nation. In San Francisco, over 67% of people have some college compared to only 48% nationally.

Additionally, San Francisco is unique in that it has a very high cost of living and housing prices are extremely high. For example, in San Francisco, the median household income is \$70,770, compared to a California median income of \$58,931, and the median cost of a home is \$785,200. To put this in perspective, the median household income in Chicago, Illinois is \$46,877 and the median cost of a home in Chicago is \$269,200. Of the total population in San Francisco, nearly 12% is living below the poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

CONCLUSION

Overall, many factors collaborate to create the economic, political, and social climate of San Francisco today. San Francisco emerged as a city because of the debauchorous and entrepreneurial spirit of the nearly all-male gold rush. The highly racialized, gendered, and classed laws surrounding sexuality and prostitution changed over the course of 160 years with a succession of progressive political leaders and police who both tolerated and profited from the city's vices. San Francisco's geographic position as an international port city contributed to its ethnic and sexual diversity which eventually spawned civil rights movements for ethnically and sexually marginalized communities.

While some aspects of prostitution in San Francisco paralleled that of other major cities, San Francisco's distinct history, geography, and demographics have created a particularly unique climate for sex work and for sex workers today that greatly inform the results of this study. For example, many of the interviewees for this study discuss the differences of sex work in San Francisco versus the other cities where they have worked, citing both positive and negative attributes of the current political climate in San Francisco where sex work is criminalized but where there are some community resources for sex workers and a movement to decriminalize sex work. In terms of understanding my research findings and analysis, San Francisco is an extremely unique setting that undoubtedly shapes the experiences of the sex workers interviewed for this study.

Chapter 4

BEYOND THE WHORE STIGMA: HOW RACE, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY

CONTRIBUTE TO SEX WORKER STIGMA

*We've been brought up our entire lives to believe that prostitutes are flawed people, you know? It's not even about disease or poverty...I mean [society] really perpetuate[s] the stereotype of, 'If you are willing to do this, something inside you is broken.' So, even if you're pulled in that direction, even if you think, 'Gosh, [sex work] can be a lot of fun to do,' there's a part of you that goes, 'But I don't want people to think I'm broken; I don't want people to think I'm flawed. I'm not broken; I'm not flawed. I'm better than that, so I'm going to go make fourteen dollars an hour letting people yell at me in a call center.'*⁶¹

Lily's quote addresses some of the myriad stigmas that sex workers face, including the notion that sex workers are emotionally damaged, vectors of disease and economically desperate. This quote, and many others within my study, suggests that stigma is so prevalent among sex workers that "[f]elt stigma is the rule rather than the exception" (Scambler, 2007, p. 1082).

Therefore, this chapter will explore how race, gender, and sexuality contribute to sex worker stigma. I argue that sex workers as a whole suffer from a specific kind of stigma but that multiple stigmas can affect sex workers differently, and that with criminal and pathological public representations, sex workers are often constructed as deviant transgressors deserving of maltreatment. I will use Erving Goffman's (1963) theories on stigma as a launching point for understanding the social process of stigmatization, with the understanding that criminalizing and pathologizing sex workers feeds into and perpetuates this stigma.

Other discussions of sex worker stigma frame it as a female phenomenon (Pheterson, 1993, 1996) and fail to acknowledge a "spectrum of stigma" that exists

⁶¹ Lily, 44, Native American, female, bisexual.

within the sex work community. This chapter aims to push the discussion of sex work stigma further by exploring the “whore stigma” that many sex workers face, stigma *within* the sex work community, and the strategies that sex workers employ to cope with these stigmas.

STIGMA: A PHENOMENON

Erving Goffman (1963) addresses social stigma in his foundational book *Stigma: Notes on the Management of a Spoiled Identity*. Tracing the origins of the term “stigma” back to the ancient Greeks, Goffman offers a brief history on the concept and then develops a definition for stigma that categorizes society into the “normals” (or, the un-stigmatized) and the *discredited* and *discreditable*. According to Goffman, those who are discredited have a visible stigma such as “abominations of the body,” physical deformities, or the stigma of race (p. 14). Those who are discreditable suffer from “blemishes of individual character” (ibid.) such as a mental disorder, imprisonment, addiction, homosexuality, prostitution, or various “unseen” stigmas.

Stigma affects both the stigmatized and the “normal” as stigma is a co-constructed phenomenon and a social process (Goffman, 1963). Results of stigma on the stigmatized individual include “self-hate” and “self-derogation,” attempts at self-repair, isolation, distrust of others (specifically “normals”), feeling self-conscious and having to calculate one’s persona (ibid., p.18-30).⁶² Goffman argues that the effect of the stigmatized on “normals” is that:

we believe the person with a stigma is not quite human. On this assumption we exercise varieties of discrimination, through which we effectively, if often

⁶² Granted, Goffman does not address that these emotions are felt by almost anyone in many social situations, even “normals.”

unthinkingly, reduce his life chances. We construct a stigma theory, an ideology to explain his inferiority and account for the danger he represents, sometimes rationalizing an animosity based on other differences, such as those of social class. We use specific stigma terms such as cripple, bastard, moron in our daily discourse as a source of metaphor and imagery, typically without giving thought to the original meaning (ibid., p. 15).

Here, Goffman makes the important point that stigmatized individuals are often dehumanized which has real, material consequences on their emotional and physical well-being. Utilizing pejorative terminology facilitates this “othering,” creating a comfortable discursive distance between the “normals” and the stigmatized. Both dehumanizing tactics and pejorative terminology as they apply to sex workers will be explored in this chapter.

Several important critiques of Goffman’s work can be made. Primarily, Goffman does not address the effects of multiple stigmas/multiple oppressions, nor does he acknowledge what I will call a “spectrum of stigma,” which is a range of stigmas experienced by any one person based on multiple axes of identity. According to Goffman, if one is a prostitute (or any other stigmatized population), then one is simply a prostitute; there is no discussion of additional stigmas experienced by prostitutes who may be male, transgender, economically disadvantaged, racially marginalized or drug-addicted. I will specifically apply the “spectrum of stigma” concept to sex workers but acknowledge that it applies to individuals within other marginalized and stigmatized communities as well. An additional critique of *Stigma* (1963) is that there is no nuanced discussion or analysis of how the structural features of society and various state apparatus

contribute to stigma. Goffman makes it clear in his other work (specifically, *Asylums: Essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates*, 1961) that the self is part of a greater overall social system and that the self “dwells...in the pattern of social control that is exerted in connection with the person by himself and those around him” (p. 168). However, in *Stigma* (1963), this concept is virtually ignored after the opening chapter, and Goffman takes social structures and cultural systems for granted instead of interrogating them. Yet, Goffman’s *Stigma* is an important canonical work that closely examines stigma as a social process and questions its effects on the stigmatized individual. His work creates a springboard for other researchers to examine and theorize about stigma.

Since *Stigma* (1963), research on stigma and the effects of being stigmatized has been expanded upon, refined, and in some cases benefited from an intersectional analysis (Collins, von Unger, & Armbrister, 2008; Berger, 2004). Deacon, Stepney, and Prosalendis (2005) suggest, “[t]he stigma literature is diverse, with three broad trends: the first two representing a polarisation between individual and macro-social levels of analysis, and the third seeking to build bridges between these (qtd. in Campbell & Deacon, 2006, p. 412). These three trends are apparent in the stigma literature applied to a number of situations and conditions including: welfare (Moffitt, 1983), HIV/AIDS (Herek & Glunt, 1988; Parker & Aggleton, 2003; Link & Phelan, 2006), mental health (Corrigan, 2006), gay and lesbian sexuality (Herek, 1991), disability (Fine & Asch,

1988), obesity (Puhl & Latner, 2007), and sex work (Pheterson, 1993, 1996; Scambler, 2007; Bradley, 2007; Koken, 2011).⁶³

There are two main criticisms within stigma research as a whole. The first is that there is no clear, agreed-upon definition of the concept “stigma” and often stigma is defined differently by different researchers. The second is that some researchers do not accurately apply the concept in their work. In an effort to mitigate these criticisms, I will utilize and expand upon Link and Phelan’s (2006) concept of stigma which is “the co-occurrence of [stigma’s] components—labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination [and]...for stigmatization to occur, power must be exercised” (p. 363). In addition, I submit there is an important component of the experience of the stigmatized individual that is critical to the concept (which Goffman addresses)—the internalization of being stigmatized and the broad range of responses to that stigmatization by those who are stigmatized.

SEX WORK AND STIGMA

Many sex workers and academics who have written about sex work address stigma, specifically “whore stigma” (Pheterson, 1993, 1996; Queen, 2001; Scambler, 2007; Blissbomb, 2010). “Whore stigma” is a concept coined by Gail Pheterson (1996) who argues that the laws and attitudes against sex workers distort the reality of sex work. Pheterson contends that these laws and attitudes erroneously dictate that sex workers do not have autonomy or agency, are without honor or integrity in their work, and are victims of male pimps and male clients (p. 60). The foundation of Pheterson’s argument

⁶³ This is a short list of only some of the topics that include discussions of stigma and is intended for the reader to understand the prevalence of stigma as a research topic over the last 50 years, since Goffman’s work was published.

is that “whore stigma” emerges from entrenched gender ideologies about women and sex, specifically that female sex workers are stigmatized because they are women:

(1) engaging in sex with strangers; (2) engaging in sex with many partners; (3) as a woman, taking sexual initiative, controlling sexual encounters, and being an expert on sex; (4) asking for money in exchange for sex; (5) as a woman, using one’s energy and abilities to satisfy impersonal male lust and sexual fantasies; (6) as a woman, being out at night alone, on dark streets, dressed to attract male desire; (7) as a woman, being in situations with supposedly brash, drunk, or abusive men whom one either can handle (“uppity or vulgar women”) or cannot handle (“victimized women”) (p. 46).⁶⁴

While Pheterson’s concept of the “whore stigma” can apply to any woman (and arguably other male or transgender sexual “deviants”) who breaks gendered expectations of sexual comportment, I would argue that the stigma is felt to varying degrees. Sex workers, specifically, experience a range of stigmas attached to their work depending on a number of factors. For example, sex workers who earn more money, work as “escorts,” entertain regular clients with a significant amount of social and cultural capital experience less stigma than those who are street-based workers, who are drug using/abusing, and who serve many clients and are less able to discriminate among those clients.

It is also important to situate the “whore stigma” within feminist thought. Radical feminists prefer to erase the sex worker, and thereby the “whore stigma;” sex positive

⁶⁴ Pheterson also discusses the stigma attached to male clients of sex workers and suggests that these men are stigmatized because they show a “lack of restraint.” Pheterson states that “a woman is ostracized for *being* a whore, a man is judged for *getting caught in the act*. Socially thus, female dishonor is attached to whore *identity*, and male unworthiness is attached to trick *behavior*” (p. 48). Though it should be noted that some scholars believe that historically male clientele have escaped such stigma altogether (Ringdal, 2004; Roberts, 1992).

feminists fear that the “whore stigma” fractures the group mentality of women; and Marxist feminist critique that sex work is a result of a lack of alternatives for women to earn higher wages in labor that does not involve their appearance/bodies/sex, which is exacerbated by the “whore stigma” (Kesler, 2002, p. 221).

The core concept of a specific type of stigma reserved for sex workers was discussed repeatedly by sex workers within my study. However, Pheterson’s concept is limited because it is predicated on a very distinct gendered division of labor whereby the sex worker is (always, unconditionally) female and the client (and pimp) is (always, unconditionally) male. Pheterson is correct in that legal and social ideologies discursively contribute to erroneous and dangerous stereotypes about sex workers. However, utilizing intersectional theory to expand upon Pheterson’s notion of the “whore stigma” generates a more complex understanding of consequences of this stigma on male, female, and transgender sex workers of various ages, races/ethnicities, sexualities, and social classes.

BEYOND PHETERSON’S “WHORE STIGMA”

How current laws facilitate stigma

As previous chapters indicate, criminalization of sex work facilitates the stigmatization of sex work and sex workers. A number of sex worker activists and scholars have addressed the negative and dangerous consequences of global anti-trafficking laws, which conflate trafficking with prostitution, directly impacting the lives of sex workers (Agustín, 2010; Desyllas, 2007; Doezema, 1998; Katsulis, 2009; Katsulis, Weinkauff, & Frank, 2010). In general, human trafficking can be understood as the illegal movement of people across national and international borders by means of force, fraud,

or coercion with the subsequent enslavement of them once the destination is reached.⁶⁵

“Yet, definitions of trafficking are highly contested among scholars, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), feminists and governments, thus posing challenges in conducting research, organizing statistics and understanding the realities of the subject. Some scholars and activists define all forms of sex work or prostitution as trafficking, countering that all commercialized sexual exchange contains an element of force, fraud, or coercion – that although there may not be a recognizable trafficker behind the scenes in a legal sense, all sex workers have at the least been “trafficked” by their clients (Y. Katsulis, personal correspondence, February, 2013). Because sex trafficking is defined as “the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act” (Logan, Walker, & Hunt, 2009, p. 8), traditional anti-trafficking discourse often conflates trafficking with sex work. This creates myriad issues about the reality of trafficking as well as barriers to effective policy-making due to the use of imprecise or undefined terminology (Katsulis, Weinkauff, & Frank, 2010, p. 171-172). There are additional consequences to conflating sex trafficking and sex work. Tiantian Zheng (2010) argues: “Anti-trafficking strategies of raid-and-rescue push sex work underground and make it more dangerous... They exacerbate the dangers, exploitations, and abuses sex workers encounter, such as continued police harassment, corruption and discrimination” (p. 10).

⁶⁵ The U.S. Department of State (2009) defines trafficking as : “(A) sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age; or (B) the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or service, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.”

Global anti-trafficking laws are closely related to federal and state laws that make sex work illegal and in the United States. For example, Federal Law (Title 8, Chapter 12, sections 1182 and 1328) specifically states: “Any alien who is coming to the United States solely, principally, or incidentally to engage in prostitution, or has engaged in prostitution within 10 years of the date of application for a visa, admission, or adjustment of status...is inadmissible,” and “[t]he importation into the United States of any alien for the purpose of prostitution, or for any other immoral purpose, is forbidden” (U.S. Federal and State Prostitution Laws, 2010). These laws express a xenophobic attitude while simultaneously contributing to dangerous, clandestine conditions for sex workers.

Some argue that members of the “rescue industry” (i.e., those seeking to rescue “victims of trafficking”) may have an exaggerated sense of the scope of sex trafficking and this perspective contributes to the construction of sex workers as victims who require a class of helpers to rescue them, establishing sex workers inferiority and ultimately accomplishing the opposite goal by stigmatizing them further (Agustín, 2010). This means that sex workers are stigmatized by global anti-trafficking laws which paint them as victims in need of rescue and federal laws that deem them immoral and undesirable.⁶⁶

Naturally, many of the sex workers in my study were aware of their stigmatized position and its connection to the criminalization of commercialized sexual exchange. “I think [sex work] being illegal really adds to the stigma and upholds it. I mean, it was stigmatized long before it was illegal, but [being illegal] really adds to [the stigma] that I’m a criminal just for selling sex. I’m a criminal” (Tracy, 27, Caucasian, female, sexually queer). Outlawing sex work blatantly criminalizes the sex work population and

⁶⁶ For additional critiques of this “victimizing” discourse see Katsulis, 2009; Agustín, 1988; Kempadoo, 1999.

places sex workers in an inferior position in the larger moral economy. Additionally, there are specific laws within San Francisco that further marginalize sex workers, negatively impact their health and safety, and affect how they cope with stigma in complex ways.

San Francisco's condoms as evidence law facilitates stigma

Laws can criminalize particular groups of people as well as behaviors, thereby stigmatizing them. Laws can also contribute to constructions of structural violence for certain communities, and as Pheterson (1996) argues, laws do not always protect, rather they can exclude the stigmatized (such as sex workers) from legal protection by failing to distinguish between individual decision and coercion and by blaming sex workers for the violence committed against them (p. 106). Pheterson's argument that laws construct sex workers as inferior aligns well with Goffman's (1963) theory that this aids "normals" to rationalize an animosity against such "criminals" (p. 15). Specifically, one of the most controversial laws in San Francisco is referred to as the condoms as evidence law.⁶⁷ Beginning in 1988, the District Attorney's office in San Francisco "initiated a policy of requesting that all condoms submitted as evidence in prostitution related offenses be photographed...and in some of our cases currently, condoms are needed as an element to prove 'the act of furtherance' in order to prove the case" (Smith, 1994). Though police were not supposed to confiscate condoms (though sometimes they did), the act of

⁶⁷ Similar laws also exist in New York City, Washington D.C., and Los Angeles. For more information on the impact of these laws on sex workers within each city, see Human Rights Watch (2012).

photographing them as evidence “appeared to be a dubious nod to public health concerns.”⁶⁸

In San Francisco, much of the anti-prostitution enforcement using condoms as evidence targeted women working in businesses such as erotic dance clubs, massage businesses, and a nightclub with transgender clientele” (Human Rights Watch, 2012, p. 2). This is an example of the power of the state exercising discrimination against sex workers by targeting specific workers in specific locations in an effort to prove furtherance of a criminal activity—prostitution. However, specifically targeting women in these venues separates, stereotypes, and labels them as criminals. An unintended consequence of this law is that it perpetuates the stereotype that sex workers are women, and it adversely impacts sex workers’ harm reduction labor practices, reducing their life chances because their work venues are reluctant to have condoms on the premises and the workers themselves are fearful of carrying “too many.”

Human Rights Watch (2012) reports the same consequences among marginalized groups targeted by the condoms as evidence law and argues that:

police use of condoms as evidence of prostitution has the same effect everywhere: despite millions of dollars spent on promoting and distributing condoms as an effective method of HIV prevention, groups most at risk of infection—sex workers, transgender women, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth—are afraid to carry them and therefore engage in sex without protection as

⁶⁸ In October 2012, in San Francisco, the condoms as evidence law was suspended for a 3-6 month trial period. This trial period could lead to a policy change which would permanently ban the use of condoms, whether confiscated or photographed, as evidence in prostitution cases (Chanoff, 2012). Unfortunately, due to the overwhelming distrust of police within the sex work community, fear of carrying “too many” condoms was still prevalent among community members at St. James Infirmary, despite the trial period.

a result of police harassment. Outreach workers and businesses are unable to distribute condoms freely and without fear of harassment as well. (p. 2)

For example, Kai (22, Caucasian, FTM transgender, sexually queer) explains that when he was caught by police doing a heroin transaction with his dealer, he was actually arrested under the condoms as evidence law. He describes:

K: I was arrested in possession of too many condoms.

KR: Can you tell me more about that?

K: And they were going to try and charge me with prostitution, but I was let go on my own recognizance. That was ridiculous.

Kai's story demonstrates that even though "too many condoms" is supposed to be used as evidence in a case against a sex worker (not as reason to be arrested) loose interpretation of the law sometimes leads to an abuse of it, and in his case, an arrest. The fear of being caught with "too many" condoms was so pervasive among my interviewees that it changed some of their harm reduction practices. For example, Mia (26, Caucasian, female, bisexual) states that she is afraid to carry many condoms with her because:

The police have stopped me once saying, "Why do you have 12 condoms?" I'm like, "'Cause I got 'em from my pharmacy." They're like, "No, you're not. You're working." But I'm trying not to carry that much. I usually carry one or two. That's it. And then if I don't have no condoms left over—if I have one or two and it's gone—I'll be asking [the client]. "You need to get condoms. It's not my responsibility to bring condoms with me." I mean, it is, but you also have to have condoms in his house, too, just in case if I run out. It's kinda helpful.

Relying on clients to supply condoms is fraught with uncertainty and an unsafe health and labor practice. As Randolph, Pinkerton, Bogart, Cecil, and Abrahamson (2007) find, “many people believe that condoms reduce sexual pleasure and that men, in particular, who believe that condoms decrease pleasure are less likely to use them” (p. 844). Unfortunately, for some female sex workers who are profiled by police, depending on the client to provide condoms becomes their perceived best option.

Condom use within the sex work community is a very complex issue. Not all sex workers use condoms, many clients pay extra to *not* wear a condom and some sex workers use them sporadically while some use them consistently. Some sex workers can attract social capital for carrying an explicit “condoms only” rule, while others can attract regulars by making exceptions to that rule and not using condoms with their regulars (Katsulis, 2009).

It is unclear whether all sex worker attitudes (not behavior) toward condoms is directly impacted by the condom as evidence law or simply by personal preference, but for some interviewees, it seems to be personal preference or a desire to make more money. For example, Elijah (32, Caucasian, male, heterosexual), states that he never uses condoms and does not feel a need to because “I don’t ever have sex with men. I let them suck my dick.”⁶⁹ Zeak (35, Caucasian, male, gay) explains his long history with barebacking because “if you did the bareback you would make more money, so then I started doing that.” Getting paid more money by clients to not use condoms is a common

⁶⁹ Later, Elijah states, “I’ve done that a few times; I’ve fucked a few men,” but couldn’t remember if he used condoms.

occurrence among sex workers all over the world.⁷⁰ Chris (50, African American, male, heterosexual but questioning) states that his condom use is sporadic and dependent upon the sex act and the client.

KR: Then with [your MTF transgender] clients, do you use condoms?

C: Yeah.

KR: Regularly or sometimes?

C: Um [pause] majority of the time, yes. You know, I mean, if they're just giving me oral sex, then it's kind of a iffy thing, some prefer to [pause] some don't want to.

KR: Okay, but if you're with a female client do you?

C: I think I should because I know a couple of the old girls used to shoot heroin.

According to Elijah, Zeak, and Chris, all male-identifying sex workers with varying clientele—male, female, and/or transgender—either use condoms occasionally or not at all, for economic reasons or out of personal preference; their decisions were not necessarily based on the law.

However, these three male-identifying sex workers, and others within the study, expressed less fear of arrest for sex work than female or MTF transgender sex workers. For example, Chris states, “[f]emales and trans are [more likely to be arrested] because usually, with a guy, most of the times police think he’s going to rob somebody or he’s selling drugs. So, you know, more times than not that’s usually what [the police] think the guy is out there doing.” In a similar sentiment, Damian (27, Caucasian and Hispanic,

⁷⁰ Lau, Tsui, and Ho (2007) find this among female sex workers Hong Kong and China, Katsulis (2009), and Kelley (2008) find this among legal and illegal sex workers in Mexico, and Shannon et al., (2009) find the same in Vancouver British Columbia.

FTM transgender, gay) has the unique experience of working both as a female sex worker before his gender transition and as a male sex worker after his gender transition. Based on his experiences, he states, “I don’t think that male sex workers get policed in the same way, so I don’t have the same worries about getting entrapped by cops.” According to Chris and Damian, the profile of sex work as female labor affords males protection from police harassment and arrest.

Chris and Damian’s quotes also demonstrate that many of the prostitution laws, including the condoms as evidence law, are based on profiling and, therefore, stigmatize specific workers. Their observations are supported by the Human Rights Watch (2012) report on condoms as evidence laws: “Police stops and searches for condoms are often a result of profiling, a practice of targeting individuals as suspected offenders for who they are, what they are wearing and where they are standing, rather than on the basis of any observed illegal activity” (p. 2). Many female and MTF transgender sex workers I interviewed felt that they had at one time been profiled by police, and even for those who had not been, there was an overwhelming fear of arrest and distrust of police in general, induced by their stigmatizing criminal status, that greatly impacted many aspects of sex workers’ emotional and physical well-being and for many, reduced their life chances.

CRIMINALIZATION, STIGMA AND STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

Because of the prevalence of arrests among the sex work community, my interviewees expressed an overwhelming fear of police, of abuses by police, of being arrested, and of ultimately being “outed” as a sex worker. The intensity of these fears varied by gender, with women and transgender sex workers feeling more targeted by the police. As Steffensmeier and Allan (1996) state that “men offend at much higher rates

than women for all crime categories except prostitution” (p. 460), in part because more sex workers are female but also because female sex workers are profiled by police. In my interview cohort, 29% percent (n=31) had been arrested for solicitation, prostitution, or charges related to prostitution, such as carrying too many condoms. Of those, 77% (n=9) were female or transgender.

Many sex workers in the study believe their female or female-identifying gender makes them more vulnerable to arrest, and they expressed a greater sense of fear toward the police and being arrested; this underscores the relationship between Pheterson’s (1993) concept of the “whore stigma” as it relates to gendered expectations around womanhood and femininity. These fears permeate many aspects of sex workers’ lives and many admit that being criminalized, and the structural violence that that entails, affects their day-to-day lives and labor practices. Specifically, a fear of arrest and a fear of the police influence how sex workers dress, where they work, how they advertise, what clients they see, time spent with a client, the time of day that they work, the names that they use while working, and whether to report abuse by a client or by the police. For example, Mia (26, Caucasian, female, bisexual), who does street-based sex work in the Mission District of San Francisco, employs a variety of strategies to avoid raising police suspicion including working during the day, using a false name, and dressing very specifically. She says:

In the Mission, it’s very different because these girls get caught all the time if they wear “hoochie” clothes, you know? So, when I do my sex work, I try to dress down. I try to dress like that because if you’re dressed more formal with tennis

shoes and not showing off your body parts, the cops are just gonna go right by you. They wouldn't even pay attention.

Mia, who has previous arrests for sex work, has to employ a variety of techniques to avoid arrest again. She also believes that she is further stigmatized for being a Caucasian female with a prostitution arrest working in an area of lower socioeconomic status with a large Hispanic population. Essentially, she says, her race stigmatizes her as a criminal for simply being in the area. Mia, and one other Caucasian sex worker, Kai, both feel that their race makes them obvious police targets within certain areas of the city because their perceived racial privilege gives them greater access to other (i.e., wealthier and less dangerous) spaces within the city; thus, their mere presence in these more disadvantaged areas is interpreted as evidence of criminalized sexual behavior.

Unfortunately, as a stigmatized population, sex workers are prone to abuses by clients and police, and the prevalence and frequency of that violence is well documented (Sanders & Campbell, 2007; Kurtz, Surratt, Inciardi, & Kiley, 2004; Campbell & Kinnell, 2000). While “[p]rostitutes have numerous stories of the sexual demands of police, lawyers, judges, and other male authorities” (Pheterson, 1993, p. 44), there needs to be more research that effectively examines if certain populations within the sex work community experience more police violence than others – and why (beyond the indoor/outdoor comparison that has been considered) (Katsulis, Lopez, Durfee, & Robillard, 2010). Additionally, while most police forces are primarily male, my interviewees report abuses and harassment by female officers as well, which has not been addressed in any research to date on sex workers and violence. The following section will

examine the vulnerabilities and additional stigmas that some sex workers feel led to their positive or negative experiences with police.

SEX WORK AND THE POLICE

Lily (44, Native American, female, bisexual), summarizes the sentiment of many sex workers in my study: “I mean, my job would be so much safer if I knew I could pick up the phone and dial 9-1-1.” Yet, many sex workers feel strongly that they cannot go to the police for help because of their criminalized, stigmatized status as sex workers. Some of my interviewees feel that there are still strongly held beliefs that sex workers cannot be raped, are less than human, and/or are liars, drug addicts, and criminals. Kai (22, Caucasian, FTM transgender, sexually queer) feels additional stigmas of being a FTM transgender and being in an outpatient drug program. All of these elements factored in to Kai’s response to being raped by a client. When I ask if he would go to the police if he was in trouble, Kai explains:

‘Cause I was doing sex work [the police] are not really going to help out with something like that. They haven’t, and I’ve been raped in San Francisco, you know? With the work I do, [saying I’ve been raped] is kinda difficult to say to some people, and you can go to the cops and they’re not going to do anything most of the time.

Partially due to the illegal nature of sex work and partially due to the stigma associated with it, “[p]rostitutes who report rape to the police tend to be ignored, ridiculed, or even threatened with additional sexual assault by police” (Alexander, 1997, p. 118). Kai’s quote summarizes the feeling of many of my interviewees who acknowledge that the police are in a powerful position to assist when something violent is enacted against

them, yet very few see this as a realistic option. Instead, many tell me of incidents of physical or psychological violence enacted upon them by police officers, particularly transgender sex workers who do not conform to the heteronormative paradigm.

For some sex workers, turning to the police for help is perceived as inviting trouble or inviting physical violence enacted by the police. While some interviewees discuss having male police officers as clients, 16% (n=31) tell me about a sexual assault by a police officer at some point in their sex work career. These assaults include forced oral sex or sexual intercourse to avoid arrest, though sometimes the sex worker was still arrested. Billie (23, Hispanic, gender queer, sexually queer) explains what happened to him while cruising a popular gay sex work area when he was startled by a police officer:

He was like, “I’m a fuckin’ cop,” and he was like, “Well, I won’t take you in if you give me a blow job.” And I was like, “Fuck!” you know? He was in uniform, so I was like, there’s no way I can win this. So, I was like, “All right, fine. I’ll give you a blow job.” And that was it. So, if anything, he was probably just there waiting to scare someone into giving him a blow job.

In Billie’s example, the officer is wearing his uniform, a physical symbol of his power to arrest Billie, complete with a gun, a Taser, and handcuffs. A version of Billie’s story was repeated by three other sex workers in my study who were coerced or forced, sometimes on more than one occasion, to give a male police officer sex or be arrested. As Belinda Brooks-Gordon (2008) points out, “Few data are available on police violence towards female or transvestite sex workers [and]...[r]igorous research is therefore needed to understand the precise context of this multiple vulnerability” (p. 908). Because of the lack of data, it is impossible to surmise how many sex workers are sexually assaulted,

coerced, or harassed by police. However, my study indicates that those sex workers who feel additionally marginalized by their prior arrest record, race, transgender, or HIV status also feel the most vulnerable to police because of their extreme loss of status. For example, Frankie (44, African American, female, heterosexual) who is HIV+ explained:

F: One cop made me do it in the back of the car. In an alley.

KR: And then what happened?

F: He got him some free head and took me to jail still.

KR: Was that here in San Francisco?

F: Mm-hmm. And I had [a different] cop that had sex with me and went back and told everybody in the pod that I had HIV positive.

KR: Can you tell me more about that story?

F: When I got arrested, he went upstairs to the pod I was going to. Said, “Oh, I have this black girl coming up here, and she HIV positive, and he gave them my name and everything, and it was rough up there, too. This is why people don’t say they’re HIV positive when they go to jail. They refuse to take the blood tests ‘cause the police is smart. They more dangerous than a pimp or a drug dealer, or they try to blackmail [you]. [One officer] made me have sex with him in the bathroom of the jailhouse. ‘Cause when you go to [get a cavity] search... I said, “I’m supposed to have a woman here searching.” [He said] “Well, we ain’t got nobody right now.”... “Ain’t nobody going to believe you ‘cause you a crack head and a prostitute.”

Frankie was sexually assaulted on more than one occasion by male police officers and sometimes subject to discursive and physical violence and public humiliation. She felt

additionally vulnerable to the police because of her long history of 14 arrests and two convictions for prostitution. These arrests made her so well known among the police officers and court system that she was stigmatized as an HIV+, drug addicted, “crack whore,” connecting to Goffman’s (1963) theory of utilizing specific stigma terms to dehumanize and “other.” According to Foucault (1975), public exhibitions of punishment serve as a socializing process, and Frankie was both physically marked by her assaults but also discursively marked out as an HIV+ prostitute, resulting in extreme status loss. For some sex workers, public and private exhibitions of punishment reify their inferior status to the police who, acting on behalf of the body politic, arrest (and sometimes assault) them, and the sex worker is left with no recourse.

One sex worker in my study reports what she describes as a positive experience with the police. Tracy (27, Caucasian, female, sexually queer) worked with police officers to investigate a (legal) peep show client of hers who would occasionally act out fantasies of molesting an underage girl with Tracy. She reported him to the police and was set up with a detective to enact a sting. Eventually, the sting was called off for fear of Tracy’s safety. According to Tracy, the detective said:

“You know, it’s not like you’re working off a case, so I don’t want to endanger you here.” And I was like, “Huh.” So, he’s basically seeing me as not a criminal and therefore worthy of concern for my safety. Like, that’s messed up. Even though he knows I’m a sex worker and this whole thing started in sex work, he’s not viewing me as a criminal and is not, like, disregarding my safety as he apparently would for somebody who he viewed as a criminal.

For Tracy, her positive experience with the police is predicated on not being viewed as a criminal (therefore resulting in status loss), but rather being viewed as a non-criminal with full access to her civil rights. It is likely that Tracy's positive experience with police was also influenced by her being a young, white, educated, female working at a legal peep show and that a sex worker of a different gender, race/ethnicity, or working illegally might be more reluctant to contact police in a similar situation. For example, in my study, only sex workers who were a racial or ethnic minority or transgender experienced police sexual assaults, including two Hispanics, one male, one MTF transgender and two African American MTF transgender sex workers. With such negative experiences with the police, it is less likely that they would contact police if they needed help. The sex workers in my study who had negative experiences with the police officers, either being harassed or sexually assaulted, felt their (mis)treatment was primarily based on being labeled as prostitutes and the stigma that entailed (compounded with additional stigmas such as race and gender). Link and Phelan (2006) argue that "[a]n almost immediate consequence of successful negative labeling and stereotyping is a general downward placement of a person in a status hierarchy. The person is connected to undesirable characteristics that reduce his or her status in the eyes of the stigmatizer" (p. 371). This status loss results in feelings of stigmatization and vulnerability.

Many sex workers (and academics) feel that criminalizing sex work exacerbates the stigma experienced by sex workers and this notion is highlighted in my study when sex workers were asked, "How do you think your life would be different if sex work was legal?" Responses included:

T: Hahaha [pause] um [pause] hmm. How would my life be different if sex work was legal? I wouldn't feel so [long pause] ashamed, I guess. I wouldn't feel like I was doing the wrong thing or the incorrect thing, like some people think it's incorrect... and that would probably take some of the guilt out of it. And the feelings of, the feelings of inadequacy of, you know, that dirtiness that you have sometimes afterwards (Tasia, 23, African American, female, heterosexual).

C: If they would make it legal, it just makes it easier for you, and then you can be more out there and you can make better choices... It makes it easier for you 'cause you don't have to be desperate (Camille, 42, African American, MTF transgender, heterosexual).

Z: I think that would actually make it safer if it was legal (Zeak, 35, Caucasian, male, gay).

M: Well, if I could do it legally, I'd carry a lot more condoms (Mia, 26, Caucasian, female, bisexual).

While these quotes align with research on the benefits of legalization or decriminalization of sex work, there were some sex workers in my study who felt that legalization would negatively impact their work because stigma would be so reduced, the market would flood and their prices would be affected. Additionally, it is fair to expect that legalization would not have a uniform affect amongst such a diverse set of participants; even when legal sex work opportunities are available to some, more marginalized populations continue to work illegally (Katsulis, 2009). Yet, if these responses suggest anything, it is that if any social or political intervention into the lives of sex workers is to be successful in reducing stigma, it must be capable of containing and reflecting contradictory

experiences of sex workers, the paradoxical ways in which they make sense of their lives and creative strategies they use to give meaning to the way they negotiate social and material conditions not of their own choosing (Phoenix, 1999, p. 189).

Criminalizing sex work becomes a primary source of stigmatization and status loss. Priscilla Alexander (1997), former sex worker turned sex workers' rights activist, states that there is a "devastating impact of intensive law enforcement practices, including frequent sweeps and the confiscation of condoms and money, so that particularly on the street, there is a high prevalence of stress and overt, clinical depression" (p. 118). For sex workers in general, I would argue that the impact of stigma is so great that it leads to dehumanization that is fostered within the broader culture.

PATHOLOGIZING AND CULTURAL STIGMAS

Criminalizing laws shape the social context of stigma, but there are ideologies, specifically about sex workers, that permeate the American culture well beyond the law. Caricatures of sex workers circulate in movies and film, on television, in video games, and in popular media. Even academic research that attempts to broaden the scope of sex work research can reconstruct stigmas and stereotypes without interrogating them, for example, by framing sex work as a female occupation and framing clients as male, or by asserting that male sex workers are strictly gay males (Browne & Minichiello, 1996; Scott et al., 2005).

As Adair (2002) suggests of the poor, I would argue for sex workers as well, "Their bodies are physically inscribed as 'other' and then read as pathological, dangerous, and undeserving" (p. 456). Perhaps sex workers are culturally stigmatized because they "choose" to be "immoral," and therefore they represent an affront not to just

middle and upper class systems but to cultural morality as well. As a result, a pathologic and deviant caricature of “the prostitute” circulates freely within the public sphere. Non-fictional representations of sex workers, for example newspaper stories regarding murdered sex workers, often show mug-shots of the murdered women (Kinnell, 2006, p. 158), thereby using their “poor choice” to become a sex worker as a cautionary tale within the dominant public sphere. Equally harmful and misleading, are fictionalized representations of sex workers found in movies, on television, in song lyrics, and in video games.

One particularly disturbing example of a fictional (mis)representation of sex workers is the popular video game created by RockStar Games, *Grand Theft Auto IV* (*GTA IV*). *GTA IV* was released on April 19, 2008, to critical acclaim, winning the “Video Game of the Year” award by the Entertainment Merchants Association (EMA). This game is played by young men and women throughout the world, selling over 20 million copies to date (Franklin, 2008). In the game, the gamer can solicit “virtual sex acts” from a sex worker (all female), can kill her, and can then take her money. Popular methods of virtually murdering sex workers include: beating with fists, feet, bats, and axes; shooting; explosions (including using grenades and rocket launchers); running over with a car; lighting on fire with a Molotov cocktail; stabbing.

Richard Rhodes (2004) adamantly argues against the notion that video games perpetuate violence stating that “violence isn’t learned from mock violence” (p. 31). However, as previous chapters address, there are dangerous implications for how contemporary mainstream public misrepresentations shape cultural stigmas of sex workers as deviant “others,” resulting in status loss, and the cultural dehumanization of

sex workers contributes greatly to the stigma associated with sex work. The representations found in *GTA IV* suggest that sex workers are a demographic worthy of physical attacks. The methods gamers use to kill the sex workers within the game are an example of this, but this point is further explicated by responses to the article “Prostitutes Call for Ban on GTA,” posted on *Gamespot*, a popular gamer blog. In response to the article, which discusses various sex workers’ rights unions calling for a ban on *Grand Theft Auto*, gamers posted these comments: “HAHAHHAAAAAAAAHA! Ok parents, don't buy games for your kids, buy prostitutes that are infected with god knows what sexually transmitted disease.” “Grand Theft Auto taught me how to boink hookers.” “ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha..... stupid hookers..... no one is going to listen to you..... you're not even real people” (qtd. in Surette, 2006). *Grand Theft Auto* and other kinds of mass media misrepresentations of sex work utilize harmful stereotypes, pejorative terminology, and negative discursive tropes to distance “normals” from those who are stigmatized. This aids in further stigmatizing the sex work community, contributing to a climate of hostility toward them that is exemplified in the quotes from the gamer blog and proves that there is “a certain regulatory regime” that dictates how humanness emerges and how it is recognized (Butler, 2004, p. 57).

Whether it is public policy or public representations, perpetuating systems of oppression benefits the dominant public because it marks out “us” from “them,” while policing the normative and creating a pathological other: “Each is conditional and dependent upon the other. The virtuous woman was constructed in relation to the production of the unvirtuous prostitute woman, just as the opposite was the case” (Bell,

1994, p. 40). Therefore, maintaining sex workers as stigmatized “others” benefits the dominant public sphere by policing the normative.

The sex workers in my study are acutely aware of their cultural stigma and status as pathologic deviants within popular culture. Lily states:

You know the bottom line is that [sigh] our culture defines sex work through the media. And the media only ever highlights trafficked people, drug abusers, pimps that are running 16 year olds and street walkers. I mean, it’s an iceberg. Most of [sex work] is not visible to the average person because the average person only ever experiences it through the newspaper or television.

Lily’s quote exemplifies that a very narrow version of sex work circulates within the dominant public sphere. As previous chapters have discussed, this version has been hundreds of years in the making labeling sex workers as indiscriminate “whores,” stereotyping them as vectors of disease who need to be rescued or disciplined (or both). Such discourse contributes to the construction of stereotypes about sex workers that are often inaccurate and can induce further discrimination against them. Luke (32, Caucasian, male, gay) laments sex worker stereotypes that pervade popular culture and contribute to sex worker stigma:

In reality, we’re inundated with “Pretty Woman,” and street walkers, and 16 year olds with track marks...I think there’s a lot of stigma that people that are working the sex industry are only at it for drugs...they, they all do drugs. I hate that stereotype. They all get high and use their money for drugs or this or that. There’s all these negative aspects, which is not true. Like, *I work in the sex industry; I don’t do drugs. But, I mean, a lot of people stigmatize and would stigmatize that.*

Many sex workers in my study express resentment toward these stereotypes for being inaccurate representations of their day-to-day lived realities and emphasize the integrity that they feel toward their work. This next section will explore some of the strategies employed by sex workers to manage stigma.

THE NEGATIVE IMPACT OF STIGMA & MANAGEMENT OF A ‘DEVIANT’ IDENTITY

Shame & Closeting

In addition to criminalizing and pathologizing sex work, moralizing and shame discourse also affects the way some sex workers in my study feel about their labor. For Maya (25, Caucasian and Chinese, female, heterosexual), one of the most difficult elements of sex work is the shame she feels as a result of the stigma associated with being a sex worker. She expresses that the greatest challenge of sex work is “our reputation sucking, no one respecting you, people laughing at you. It’s horrible. It’s the bottom of the barrel type shit. It makes you feel bad about yourself. I can’t even look in the fuckin’ mirror. You want to stay high all the time to just live with yourself.”

According to Scambler (2007), stigma can be so prevalent among sex workers that there is no reliable or effective release from it, namely because of a sense of shame coupled with a fear of potential rejection, even ostracism, on the part of others *should they find out* (p. 1082, emphasis in original). Shame and fear of rejection is so predominant for some of my interviewees that they opt to closet their sex worker status from friends and family—whether they are full-time sex workers or using sex work as a supplement to their “straight” jobs.

The concept of “closeting” entails not revealing an aspect of one’s identity and is most often applied to closeting sexuality (Sedgwick, 1990; Cole, 2006; Warner, 2005).

Typically, closeting serves as a metaphor for gay, lesbian, transgender or gender queer and sexually queer individuals who do not publicly disclose their gender or sexuality. For a stigmatized individual, the closet can feel both like protection and oppression because it often means that an individual must “perform” some aspect of their identity. Closeting is also an apt metaphor for many sex workers who hide their sex worker status. Staying in the closet not only allows individuals to avoid the risk of unintended exposure, but also allows them to create a protected social space that permits the individual (in this case, a sex worker) to fashion a working self and to navigate a path between the outer world and the sex industry (Kong, 2002; 2006). For example, Taylor (28, Caucasian, gender queer, sexually queer) did not reveal his sex worker status to family members and instead constructed a false occupation, explaining that “[t]hey think I am a dog-walker.” Taylor chooses to closet his sex worker identity for a number of reasons, including not wanting to lose his family’s financial support and not wanting his family to be concerned for his safety.

Michael Warner (2005) argues that though the closet is publicly constructed, the stigmatized individual must negotiate their private identity as the basis for public evaluation (p. 52-53). In this same vein, many sex workers in my study express that they closet their sex work status for a variety of reasons that include: fear of judgement/rejection; fear of arrest; fear of losing their “straight” job; and not wanting to “burden” or “worry” others. One sex worker, Beatrix (29, Hispanic, female, sexually queer), expresses that she would not tell her family she is a sex worker because she supports them with her earnings. She feels ambivalent about this because she often resents her family asking her for money, musing: “It would be a lot easier if I could just

be like, ‘Stop asking me for money! Do you know what I do for a living?’ But of course, I can’t tell them that.” Beatrix’s quote expresses some of the complexities of closeting: because her family *didn’t* know what she does for a living, and she does not feel that she can tell them, she developed feelings of resentment while simultaneously believing that she was protecting them from the stigma and shame of having a daughter who is a sex worker and the illegality of living off of a sex workers’ wage. For her, and other sex workers, “[t]he practice of closeting not only protects [the sex worker] but also their families, as living on the earnings of the prostitution of others is an offence” (Kong, 2006, p. 425).

Additionally, some sex workers closet their occupation because they have experienced previous rejection by family members due to their sexuality, transgender, or HIV+ status and feel that due to their families’ inability to cope with those aspects of their identities, their family members would further reject them for being sex workers. As Luke (32, Caucasian, male, gay) explains:

L: I would love to tell my family, like, “Yeah, I work in the sex industry,” but I’d be terrified.

KR: Why?

L: Especially because there’s already all these other judgments with who I am, being gay.

KR: Why do you feel you want to tell them that you’re a sex worker?

L: Because I want to be able to be open about it. It’s something I’m not ashamed of it but I want [pause] I’m scared to tell other people because I don’t want them

to change their view of who I am as a person... They would see that stigma, and they'd be like, "I don't even know you."

Luke, and others in my study, feel that multiple stigmas were too much for their family members to bear, but perhaps also feel more comfortable outing their sexuality on the premise that sexual identity is biologically determined. *Choosing* to be a sex worker, on the hand, can be seen as an unjustifiable affront to morality, decency, and middle-class respectability.

Some sex workers chose to "out" themselves to their family or were "outed" due to an arrest for sex work. Reasons varied from wanting to feel authentic and truthful, needing assistance or bail money, having it disclosed by others, or family members finding out. In many circumstances, family members rejected the sex workers, leaving painful emotional wounds, like in the case of Maya (25, Chinese and Caucasian, female, heterosexual):

KR: Okay, tell me a little bit about your relationship with your mom.

M: She's there for me as best as she can, but she doesn't understand.

KR: Does she know that you do sex work?

M: Yeah. She can't believe I am her daughter. She feels like I was a dud. She regrets wasting herself on me. She sacrificed her life to raise me and this is not what she wanted for me [crying]... It feels like I became my parent's worst fuckin' nightmare. I wasn't what they weren't going for, you know?

Maya's sex worker stigma is compounded by her drug addiction, both of which she believes contribute to her family rejecting her. Either due to rejection by friends or family members, or in fear of it, many sex workers in my study opt instead to isolate themselves

from others as a coping mechanism for stigma, or what Alexander (1997) refers to as “stigma management” (p. 118).

Isolation

When asked what she feels are the negative aspects of sex work, Beatrix (29, Hispanic, female, sexually queer) explains, “I want to say by and large the isolation bit, and the isolation bit I really attribute directly to the stigma around sex work. If it wasn’t for that stigma, we would be a lot less isolated. So, yeah, definitely the isolation.”

Stigma and isolation seem to go hand-in-hand within the sex work community. The stigmatized, argues Goffman (1963), are “likely to feel that to be present among normals nakedly exposes him to invasions of privacy” (p. 18-30), and in an effort to avoid this, many sex workers in my study isolate themselves from relationships with others. Some research on sex work suggests that sex workers, specifically those who are trafficked or who have pimps, are purposefully isolated (Leidholdt, 2004; Williamson & Cluse-Tolar, 2002); other research addresses the social process and effects of isolation but only female sex workers have been considered (Hoigard & Finstad, 1992; McKeganey & Barnard, 1996). However, my study reveals that male, female, and transgender sex workers experience feelings of isolation, and many sex workers isolate themselves not only from “normals” but also from other members in the sex work community as a calculated choice. Reasons for isolating include: fear of judgment/rejection; distrust; implicit “codes” on the street; and fear of arrest.

Processes of isolation that my study participants engage in include distancing from family and friends by lying about or withholding their sex worker status; not

engaging in intimate partner relationships; not engaging in friendships or other social networks. Here is how some of the interviewees describe examples of isolation:

B: Part of what was difficult for me in doing sex work was the having to lie to my family about what I was doing, and it created kind of, like, this distance (Beatrix 29, Hispanic, female, sexually queer).

C: Negatives [of sex work are] you're lonely um... you have no [partner] for yourself (Chris, 50, African American, male, heterosexual but questioning).

K: And [the other transgender sex workers who trained me on the streets], their saying was to me 'today's tricks, tomorrow's competition.' And they always saw that as competition, another girl out on the streets. So, you're pretty much isolated. Yeah. They didn't want to get too chummy at all. ...So, you know, there was a lot of isolation (Kendra, 53, Caucasian, MTF transgender, sexually queer).

E: I isolate a lot. You know, I don't do well with other people. If I'm roaming the streets, I don't really care to have a sidekick. It becomes kind of a hassle 'cause I'm the kind of person that likes to do what I want to do, when I want to do, when I'm on the streets because I know what I'm doing. You know what I'm saying? Whether it's because I'm looking for a date or whether it's because I'm gonna make money on selling dope. I know what I'm doing. I'm gonna succeed in the end but other people bring me down (Elijah, 32, Caucasian, male, heterosexual).

Each of these quotes highlights the complex nature of isolation, which can be both physical and emotional, as a means of stigma management. Although isolation seems to be a negative effect of sex work, for many sex workers in my study, it seems that creating

personal relationships which could ultimately lead to rejection or vulnerability, was too great of an emotional risk.

STIGMA WITHIN THE SEX WORK COMMUNITY AND REFUSING THE SEX WORKER IDENTITY

Stigma is a complex phenomenon that is compounded by criminalizing and pathologizing sex workers. This phenomenon affects individuals of stigmatized groups differently and to different degrees because sex workers, like any other wage laborer, work from positions of unequal privilege (S. Hall, 1996). Every identity has a history, and one's identity cannot be separated from one's age, or racial, sexual, or class positions. Therefore, it is logical that stigma can be perpetuated by those *within* a stigmatized group. The sex work community is no exception as there is a clear hierarchy among sex workers that is facilitated by stigmas that exist within the community. This sort of "spectrum of stigma" while not addressed by Goffman (1963), is well documented in sex work research.

As the research indicates, the hierarchy of sex work is based on a number of factors and includes the most highly stigmatized as street-based workers and the least stigmatized as independently employed sex workers who work in indoor venues (Kong, 2006; Brewis & Linstead, 2000c; Huang, Hendersen, Pan, & Cohen, 2004; O'Connell Davidson, 1998). Sex workers are stratified according to venue hierarchy within the industry as well as hierarchies of race/ethnicity, age, physical appearance, HIV status, drug use, and working independently or with a "pimp." The sex workers in my study are well aware of these various hierarchies and how they directly impact their work. For example, Tasia (23, African American, female, heterosexual) says, "I mean, definitely

race plays a part out there on the street. Because, just being African-American, is kind of like you're lower in status.”

Similarly, Kai (22, Caucasian, FTM transgender, sexually queer) had experiences in sex work that both confirmed his Caucasian race as an asset in sex work but proved it to be a liability while living in the Tenderloin. Kai is very small, just barely five feet tall and very petite. He has piercings through his lower lip and several tattoos. When I meet him, he is wearing a baggie brown hoodie, jeans, and Converse canvas tennis shoes. In reality, Kai looks like a 15 year old boy and is aware of how his appearance affects his status as a sex worker in the Tenderloin. Kai discusses the importance of creating a persona when he walks around the Tenderloin that does not show any of his perceived weaknesses (being small, Caucasian, and drug addicted). According to Kai, being Caucasian negatively impacts his life in the Tenderloin because it makes him stand out to the police. Yet, in terms of sex work, being Caucasian helps him earn more money. Kai says, “I get more money being white, you know. I can command way more than somebody twice my age and black.” Kai believes he is able to earn more because, even though he shoots drugs, he is perceived as “clean” due to his well-kept appearance and because white sex workers are more “valuable” than black sex workers. Race is but one example of multiple oppressions that exist within a stigmatized community. In fact, many interviewees in my study refuse the label of “sex worker,” further highlighting the stigma associated with the occupation and the hierarchies implicit within the community.

Some interviewees state that they are not sex workers because they do not fit the stereotype of working on the street. For example, when I ask if they identify as sex workers, Grace and Chris reply:

G: No, not really. Because well, I'll be honest to you Kate, I really don't work it so much on the streets like that. All the people they knows me and they just calling me and introducing me friends and that's what it is (Grace, 36, Hispanic, MTF transgender, heterosexual).

C: Not at first, not really because I've always thought a sex worker as a street-walker. You know, a female prostitute (Chris, 50, African American, male, heterosexual).

Others refuse the label of sex worker because they consider themselves discerning with their clientele. When I ask if they identify with the term "sex worker," some responses are:

M: I'm not trying to label anyway. I'm particular; I don't want anybody just touching me (Madie, 44, African American, female, heterosexual).

A: I would say yes and no. Well, if I use "sex work," it's like...I don't lift my legs to every Tom, Dick, and Harry that walks by. ["Sex worker"] makes me feel dirty. But if I don't have the money, yeah, then I do it for profit. That makes it a little bit more cleaner and sounds a little bit more better [laughs] (Adriana, 47, Caucasian, MTF transgender, bisexual).

Z: I don't seek anybody out, you know. I'm not out there knocking on your door saying, "Hey, you want a blowjob?" You know, you guys are emailing; they're emailing me; they're calling me. They're coming to me; I'm not going to them, so, to me, that makes it alright 'cause it's not like [pause] I'm not hiding behind a bush in the dark saying, "Hey, here old man, here old man," kind of a thing, you

know? They're coming to me and I do turn people down. I don't go with every single person that offers. I do have limits (Zeak, 35, Caucasian, male, gay).

By refusing the label of sex worker, these respondents also refuse to adopt the stigmas associated with the term (such as working on the street, not being discerning, being overtly solicitous of sex). Their responses suggest that the stigmatized discourse of sex work is so pervasive that it permeates and flourishes within the community itself, perpetuating stereotypes and aiding in the creation of hierarchies within the sex work community. However, while stigma within the sex work community seems to have a negative impact on some sex workers, many of my interviewees also express positive outcomes of sex work stigma, including political resistance and campaigns for sex workers' rights, which the next chapter will explore further.

CONCLUSION

In our society, stigma can work to reinforce specific ideologies about social morality, requiring people to police their behaviors in ways that support the economic, political, and social status quo.⁷¹ Parker and Aggleton (2003) contend that stigma and stigmatization are at the core of the social order and the social order “promotes the interests of dominant groups as well as distinctions and hierarchies of ranking between them, while legitimating that ranking by convincing the dominated to accept existing hierarchies through processes of hegemony” (p. 6). Yet, for those who exist outside of the dominant public sphere, and function in a subordinated position in the existing

⁷¹ For an elaboration on this theme, see Crawford's (1994) study of AIDS stigma in the United States which suggests that the stigmatization of people with HIV/AIDS is compounded by the association of HIV/AIDS with other marginalized groups such as intravenous drug users, gay men, sex workers, and ethnic and racial minorities.

hierarchies, stigma can construct negative physical and emotional consequences and reduce life chances.

While Goffman's (1963) theories about stigma could benefit from being expanded upon and updated with use of an intersectional analysis, his core theories of the social construction of stigmas, the consequences of living with stigmas, and the damaging effects of stigmas are important to explore and his theories remain relevant today. Specifically applying his theories to the identities available for sex workers proves that those identities are very limited in range and have been spoiled by a long history of discursive violence. Sex work stigma is facilitated and perpetuated by criminalizing and pathologizing discourse that is so pervasive it circulates within the community itself and forces sex workers to employ a variety of strategies to cope with stigma management.

Chapter 5

“I AIN’T NOBODIES’ HO’’: STRATEGIES FOR CONSTRUCTING A POSITIVE SELF-CONCEPT AMONG SEX WORKERS

When I first started getting into activism I really wanted to identify as a sex worker, and I understood the importance of that term or the history of that term. But again, I eventually just really quickly started to have this idea that just because we’re sex workers or even work in the same industry doesn’t mean that we have the first thing in common, and I started thinking a lot about identity and what it means and decided that my identity is very complex, and I have multiple identities.⁷²

As Beatrix’s quote suggests, often an individual’s self-concept is closely linked to multiple axes of identity, including gender, race/ethnicity, sexuality, and collective group identification.⁷³ Tajfel and Turner’s research (1986) asserts that social identity is part of the individual’s self-concept derived from membership to a collective social group.⁷⁴ One important collective social group identity is often one’s occupation (Christiansen, 1999), and this is true for sex workers as well. However, my study reveals that when one’s occupation is highly stigmatized, an individual must employ strategies to construct a positive self-concept in the face of a negative social group identity.

Previous chapters examine various forms and degrees of stigma that sex workers experience and the consequences of those stigmas. As discussed, Goffman’s *Stigma* (1963) explores the important idea that identity is a co-constructed phenomenon between the stigmatized and the “normals” and a stigmatized identity is the result of deviation from the social norm. Goffman serves as an appropriate precursor to Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* (1975) which interrogates the intersections between power and

⁷² Beatrix, 29, Hispanic, female, sexually queer.

⁷³ “Self-concept” refers to a person’s overarching view of self (Gecas, 1982).

⁷⁴ “Social identity” refers an identity “attributed or imputed to others in an attempt to place or situate them as social objects . . . based primarily on information gleaned [from] appearance, behavior, and the location and time of action” (Snow & Anderson, 1987, p. 1347).

knowledge that are constituted by the discourse of identity normalization. In *Discipline*, Foucault establishes that specific social structures are constructed and maintained in an effort to police behaviors and enforce social stigmas and hierarchies. This theory is in praxis with Maya (25, Chinese and Caucasian, female, heterosexual) who, at the age of 15, was labeled a juvenile offender for shoplifting and drug possession. She was sent to juvenile hall and state mandated rehabilitation programs in the state's efforts to "normalize" her behavior. She says:

I kept violating [parole]; I kept doing dirty pee-tests and um [pause], it went from, just regular probation when they'd keep coming every once in a while to check up on me, to then taking my parents' custody rights away...so I got, again, sent to the group homes and rehabs and stuff throughout California to try to make me normal again.

State sanctioned programs, such as juvenile hall and mandated rehabilitation, are excellent examples of Foucault's notion of social structures designed to both police behaviors and construct a sense of "normal" and "deviant" behavior, affecting one's self-concept (Kaplan & Lin, 2000).

Utilizing social identity theory as a framework, this chapter will highlight how sex workers' identity constructions are specifically affected by the occupational stigmas addressed in Chapter 4. This chapter will also explore both collective group strategies and individual strategies utilized to construct positive self-concepts among the sex workers in my study, and how social, or group, identities can be different than personal identities or how they can be aligned. Finally, this chapter will discuss the consequences of

internalizing the stigmatized identity of a “dirty job” and balancing multiple stigmatized identities.

“OCCUPATIONAL SUBALTERN COUNTERPUBLIC”

Previous chapters establish that the sex work community can be viewed as a subaltern counterpublic (Fraser, 1990) which is a marginalized group excluded from the public sphere that forms its own “public sphere.”⁷⁵ Subaltern counterpublics are “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (ibid., p. 112). State sanctioned programs, laws, and cultural stigmas all contribute to the maintenance of a dominant public sphere and thus the creation of subaltern counterpublics, some of which, I argue, can be “occupational subaltern counterpublics.” I am coining this term to suggest that some occupations can serve as counterpublics, which Fraser argues have a “dual character” to function as “spaces of withdrawal and regroupment” on one hand, while acting as “bases, training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics” on the other (p. 68). The concept of an “occupational subaltern counterpublic” suggests that oppressed occupational groups can affect change within the dominant public sphere while still maintaining an independent collective identity, for example the United Farm Workers Union established

⁷⁵ There are overlaps between a “subculture” and a “counterpublic.” While counterpublics are not the same as subcultures, the former has a constitutive link to the latter. A subculture both makes and is made by its counterpublics. Yet they differ because “[a] counterpublic, against the background of the public sphere, enables a horizon of opinion and exchange; its exchanges remain distinct from authority and can have a critical relation to power; its extent is in principle indefinite, because it is not based on a precise demography but mediated by print, theater, diffuse networks of talk, commerce, and the like. . . . [T]his subordinate status does not simply reflect identities formed elsewhere; participation in such a public is one of the ways by which its members’ identities are formed and transformed” (Warner, 2005, p. 56-57). I choose to utilize “counterpublics” because Fraser uses this concept in direct response to Habermas’ public sphere.

by César Chávez and the Exotic Dancer's Union (Local 790) which unionized the Lusty Lady peep show in San Francisco.

Additionally, membership to an “occupational subaltern counterpublic,” such as sex workers, influences one's cultural and personal identity in unique and challenging ways. For example, Michael Warner (2005) suggests, “[t]he subordinate status of a counterpublic does not simply reflect identities formed elsewhere; participation in such a public is one of the ways by which its members' identities are formed and transformed. A hierarchy or stigma is the assumed background of practice. One enters at one's own risk” (p. 121). This begs the question: how does membership to an “occupational subaltern counterpublic” affect one's self-concept? One's identity construction? Specifically, if one is a member of an “occupational subaltern counterpublic” that is also a “dirty job”?

“Dirty jobs” or “dirty work” refer to “physically, socially, and morally tainted work” (Hughes, 1958, p. 122). Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) expand upon this original definition, adding:

Physical taint occurs where an occupation is either directly associated with garbage, death, effluent, and so on (e.g., butcher, janitor) or is performed under particularly dangerous conditions (e.g., miner, soldier). *Social taint* occurs where an occupation involves regular contact with people or groups that are themselves regarded as stigmatized (e.g., prison guard, AIDS worker) or where the worker appears to have a servile relationship to others (e.g., shoe shiner, maid). *Moral taint* occurs where an occupation is generally regarded as somewhat sinful or of dubious virtue (e.g., exotic dancer, psychic) or where the worker is thought to employ methods that are deceptive, intrusive, confrontational, or that otherwise

defy norms of civility (e.g., tabloid reporter). Of course, the boundaries between the physical, social, and moral dimensions are inherently fuzzy, and many occupations appear to be tainted on multiple dimensions. Examples include hospice workers (physical and social), executioners (physical, social, and moral), and sex workers (physical and moral) (p. 415).

Ashforth and Kreiner's definition suggests that, culturally, certain occupations are constructed as more or less tainted, and thereby more or less prestigious. However, while some occupations are deemed more tainted/less prestigious, they are still, to varying degrees, culturally necessary. This creates an interesting dynamic, specifically for sex workers, who are often morally condemned, physically targeted, and highly stigmatized, yet in high demand. This exemplifies a paradox with which many workers in "dirty jobs" have to wrestle: participating in a tainted occupation but being stigmatized for doing so—and that stigma affects both the individual and collective group's identity construction.

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY

Social identity theory states that conceptions of the self are at least partly grounded in the perceptions of others (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008). Agreeing with the theory that individuals seek to enhance their self-esteem through their social identities (Ashforth, Kreiner, Clark, & Fugate, 2007; Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999), a tainted, less prestigious occupation becomes a direct identity-threat for sex workers because they face the challenge of constructing a positive self-concept while their work has negative associations. Therefore, sex work requires extreme identity work,⁷⁶ because "occupations are key not just to being a person, but to being a particular person, and thus

⁷⁶ "Identity work" refers to the activities individuals engage in to construct and maintain personal identities that are congruent with their self-concept (Snow & Anderson, 1987, p. 1348).

creating and maintaining an identity” (Christiansen, 1999, p. 547). While creating and maintaining an identity is a constant social process, sex workers’ identity work is further complicated by constructing a positive self-concept among such stigma and taint.

A critique of some studies using social identity theory is that stigma and identity are treated as if they are cleanly defined, static concepts (Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008). Yet, more recent studies using social identity theory as a framework recognize that identity construction and even stigmatization is an ongoing social process that involves constant contextual shifting and flexibility. In the vein of these studies, I would like to explicate that my analysis is based on the understanding that both identity and stigmatization are contextually based and dynamic concepts that are further complicated by additional axes of identity such as age, race, gender, sexuality, and class.

An additional critique of studies involving identity is that the concept of “identity” or concepts related to identity are poorly defined or incorrectly applied. Therefore, it is important to clarify what I mean by the concepts that I will be using, which have been largely foot-noted up to this point:

Personal Identities: Are “self-designations and self-attributions brought into play or asserted during the course of interaction” (Snow & Anderson, 1987, p. 1347). One’s personal identity is how one presents oneself to the outside world.

Social Identities: Are “attributed or imputed to others in an attempt to place or situate them as social objects . . . based primarily on information gleaned [from] appearance, behavior, and the location and time of action” (Snow & Anderson, 1987, p. 1347). One’s social identity is how the outside world perceives them based on observable factors. Social identities can be different than personal identities or they can be aligned.

Self-concept: Refers to a person's overarching view of self (Gecas, 1982).

Identity work: Refers to the activities individuals engage in to create, present or sustain personal identities that are congruent with the self-concept (Snow & Anderson, 1987).

All of these concepts work together (or, at times, against each other) during the dynamic and ongoing process of identity construction. Because identity construction is a fluid process, one concept may be privileged over the others, depending on the context of the situation.

“Although there is no agreement on whether identity should be conceptualized as a unitary entity or disaggregated into several types” (Snow & Anderson, 1987, p. 1347), there is a thorough history of research that explores how stigmatized *groups* (i.e., unitary entities) engage in identity work to cope with their identity-threatening stigmas (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Ashforth, Harrison, & Corely, 2008; Hughes, 1958; van Vuuren, Teurlings, & Bohlmeijer, 2012). In the context of dirty work, some studies primarily take *the group* as the unit of analysis (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Kreiner, Ashforth, & Sluss, 2006), and others focus on *the individual* (i.e., disaggregated) as the unit of analysis. Goffman (1963) makes a distinction between the collective group identity and the individual identity (p. 129-149), but more recent scholarship makes this distinction a central focus. Specifically, recent scholarship investigates how the salience of group identity can diffuse feelings of stigmatization (Dovidio, Gaertner, Niemann, & Snider, 2001) and strategies for coping with identity threats are often rooted in an association with an identity-relevant group membership (Crandall, Tsang, Harvey, & Britt, 2000). Therefore, my analysis will include both group and individual strategies utilized to construct positive self-identities and self-concepts because “occupational subaltern

counterpublics,” such as sex workers, in the San Francisco Bay Area specifically, have employed various strategies to construct a positive group identity that influences the self-concept of individuals *within* the collective group.

IDENTITY WORK

Those with stigmatized occupations or who perform “dirty work” must participate in additional and complex identity work. As previously noted, “identity work” refers to the activities individuals engage in to create, present or sustain personal identities that are congruent with their self-concept. Some collective group strategies utilized to construct positive self-concepts among my study participants include: constructing a safe/empowering space; creating positive media campaigns; engaging in political activism; and utilizing positive discourse. I argue that these strategies are examples of the *positive* impact of stigma. Individual strategies for a positive self-concept include: refusing/distancing from the sex worker identity; concealment/passing; adopting the sex worker identity; embracing multiple identities; and construction of fictive kinships.

However, not all of the sex workers in my study had a positive self-concept, so this chapter also examines *why* some sex workers are unable to construct a positive self-concept in relation to their labor, despite the “occupational subaltern counterpublic’s” effort to construct a positive collective identity.

GROUP STRATEGIES FOR CONSTRUCTING A POSITIVE COLLECTIVE

IDENTITY

Chapter 4 explores the negative impact of stigma; however, there can also be positive effects of stigma. Counter-hegemonic tendencies, or resistance, can take many forms (Duncombe, 2002), and where there is discrimination based on a stigmatized

identity, there are opportunities for resistance and for remaking the collective identity. In the sex work community in San Francisco, many sex workers have worked toward combatting negative social identity constructions and the stigmatized identity of “sex worker.” Using Snow and Anderson’s (1987) four activities of identity work as a framework, I argue that St. James Infirmary employs a number of group strategies to construct a positive collective identity for sex workers. These strategies include: (1) the arrangement of physical settings and props (accomplished by constructing a safe/empowering space); (2) cosmetic face work or the arrangement of personal appearance (accomplished by creating positive media campaigns); (3) selective association with other people or social groups (accomplished by engaging in political activism); and (4) identity talk that includes “fictive story-telling,” “distancing,” and “embracement,” (accomplished by “distancing” from negative sex work discourse such as trafficking/forced labor/sexual slavery and “embracement” of positive discourse).

Safe Space

With the establishment of COYOTE (Call off Your Old Tired Ethics) the first advocacy and social service organization for sex workers’ rights in 1973, in San Francisco, there was an advocacy group interested in working for the rights of all sex workers.⁷⁷ This led to the sponsoring and funding of St. James Infirmary, which became a national model for peer-based programs for sex workers.

As discussed in previous chapters, St. James creates a unique physical setting where sex workers, of all classes and genders, access holistic health care, peer counseling, and harm reduction tools that is unlike any other support system within the

⁷⁷ For a comprehensive overview of the reconstruction of prostitution as a social problem and how so-called deviants can act to frame the debates that affect their lives, see Jenness (1990, 1993).

community. In my interviews, I asked each individual where they go within the community for support. Answers included: City Clinic, Walden House, Trans Thrive, community churches, Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous groups, and many respondents mention the importance of a safe space such as St. James Infirmary that specializes in non-judgmental care for sex workers.⁷⁸ When asked about which community programs she participates in, Mia (26, Caucasian, female, bisexual) explains a unique benefit of St. James:

KR: Are you involved in any community programs? Do you go anywhere for support within the community?

M: Well, I'm here at St. James.

KR: Do you go anywhere else?

M: Not really.

KR: Okay. So, do you feel that St. James gives you support?

M: Mm-hmm, yeah. And safety, also, here. Like, if you're a sex worker and you come in here and your pimp has run after you, it's a safety hazard. You come in here, they talk to the pimp, tell them to go away, you know?

To Mia, St. James represents a literal safe space where she can find physical safety from a dangerous pimp. However, some sex workers also find St. James to be an ideologically safe space that aids in the construction of a positive collective identity. For example, at one point in her career, Tracy (27, Caucasian, female, sexually queer) worked as a part of

⁷⁸ While City Clinic is also open to all classes and genders, it does not provide the same type of peer counseling that St. James provides sex workers; Walden House provides comprehensive care to marginalized populations, including health care, mental health care, post-prison re-entry services, in and out-patient rehabilitation etc.; and Trans Thrive is a drop-in center that offers care within the transgender community.

an in-call co-op of sex workers who rented a space together and pooled expenses and profits. She explains that “[w]hatever [money] we had over our rent and supplies, we would donate a percentage to St. James Infirmary.” Tracy further explains that she and the members of the co-op did this because “[i]t felt like this really beautiful thing we were doing. That we were really supporting each other and also supporting our community.” Tracy’s quote exemplifies that she feels like a part of a collective identity of a “community” of sex workers. According to Polletta and Jasper (2001):

collective identity is an individual’s cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution. It is a perception of a shared status or relation, which may be imagined rather than experienced directly, and it is distinct from personal identities, although it may form part of a personal identity...collective identity carries with it positive feelings for other members of the group. (p. 285)

It is important to recognize, that San Francisco is one of the few cities in the United States where there is a sex work *community* that acts on behalf of sex workers’ rights, political organizing, and activism. This community emerged, in part, because “many prostitutes have been excluded from social support networks such as family, church, and community, [so] they often create their own networks” (Weiner, 1996, p. 102), and this affords sex workers in San Francisco access to support within the community or among other sex workers, which is an important networking opportunity for stigmatized populations. According to Goffman (1963), “[a] very widely employed strategy for of the discreditable person is to handle his risks by dividing the world into a large group to whom he tells nothing, and a small group to whom he tells all and upon whose help he

relies” (p. 117). Having a community with which to ally oneself allows sex workers a safer physical and ideological space (though, as discussed in Chapter 4, still a space with implicit stigma and hierarchies).

Yet, for some sex workers, involvement with St. James Infirmary on a regular basis can contribute to feelings of ambivalence toward their experiences within sex work and the collective identity of being a sex worker. For example, Abby (33, Hispanic, MTF transgender, same gender loving) explains that she sometimes feels “committed to” sex work. When probed further about what keeps her feeling committed, she explains, “I guess the community behind it, like coming to Saint James and stuff. It kind of feels like I should be ‘pro-sex work’ all the time.” Abby’s quote highlights that personal identities and movements/collective identities are linked (Snow & McAdam, 2000, p. 42) but often in very complex ways. While the group, especially an “occupational subaltern counterpublic” of a “dirty job” works toward constructing a positive collective identity, it may mute the voices of the disenchanted group members because their message conflicts with the larger positive message of the group.

Positive Media Campaigns

An additional strategy employed by the St. James Infirmary to construct a positive collective identity was to develop a recent media campaign. The “Someone you know is a sex worker” campaign began “to raise public awareness about sex workers’ rights” (St. James Infirmary, 2012). Posters, billboards, and postcards, using the portraits and interviews of 27 Bay Area sex workers, their family members, and service providers from the St. James Infirmary were used to create the campaign. According to the St. James



Figure 6: An example of the large “billboard” posters that went on municipal buses and trains within the San Francisco Bay Area. Photo courtesy of the St. James Infirmary.

website, the goals of the campaign were: 1) To point out that sex workers are everyday people and are valued members of the community; 2) To educate the general community that sex workers are equal members of society and that our rights are human rights; 3) To promote our position that sex work is real work and that sex workers deserve labor rights; 4) To raise awareness about the important work of the St. James Infirmary. The campaign publicly launched in August 2012 and included various large posters with information about St. James, and individual “agency posters” with quotes and photos of individuals.

The original intent of the media campaign was to have billboard advertisements throughout San Francisco. However, when St. James approached CBS Outdoor and Clear Chanel, owners of the billboard space within the city, the campaign was rejected because the words “sex work” and “sex worker” were not considered “family friendly” terms by these major advertisers. St. James continued its search for agencies that would allow their campaign to circulate within the greater public sphere. “Committed to the global sex

worker rights movement, and the core principles that sex work is real work, that our rights are human rights, that we deserve social justice and labor rights, [St. James Infirmary] sought other vendors who would accept our message as a very human message suitable for every family.” Eventually, St. James was able to place their campaign posters and billboards on the sides of the municipal buses and trains within the city (St. James Infirmary, 2012).

Creating this media campaign with the above goals contributes to the objective of St. James to circulate an activist discourse within the greater public sphere, allowing the voice of an “occupational subaltern counterpublic” to be acknowledged in effort to reduce the stigma of a “dirty job” while simultaneously working toward constructing a positive collective identity. This media campaign is a good example of how a collective identity can be transformed within the public sphere because “movements also transform cultural representations, social norms—how groups see themselves and are seen by others” (Polletta & Jasper, 2001, p. 284).

However, one of my interviewees featured in the media campaign had mixed feelings toward her overt membership to the collective identity of sex worker because the campaign became a direct identity-threat.⁷⁹ She said that once the campaign became public, she was suddenly terrified of the exposure and her affiliation to this “dirty job,” which she had since quit:

It was like, okay, can you still hold your head up? Can you still walk down the street with any type of integrity? Because at first, even with these posters, I started to call [St. James] and tell ‘em, “You know what? You gotta take me out of this

⁷⁹ To keep this individual’s identity confidential, I have not included the name or description of this individual with the following quote.

[campaign] because people are literally seeing me on the bus and seeing me affiliated with St. James.”... And when they see the word “sex worker,” they literally are under the assumption that everybody that comes up in here are still doing sex work, which is really sad. I don’t know how St. James or any other agency can change some of that stigma about themselves. But that’s what my experience has been. But, even like I said, throughout all of that, I had to learn first of all, this is my choice. This is my choice.

This individual’s panic toward an association with a specific institution, such as St. James, which exclusively represents current and former sex workers, is consistent with the reaction many have when their social identity becomes incongruent with their self-concept (Sayles, 1984). So, she made an attempt to distance herself from that institution in an effort to regain a positive self-concept. Eventually, this individual reasoned that being part of the campaign was her “choice,” but she clearly feared negative repercussions that could result from being such a visible member of the collective identity of sex worker.

Arguably, an additional goal of the media campaign was to seek a humanizing approach to sex workers and to “normalize” sex work as an occupation. In many ways, this campaign mirrors the 1950s Mattachine Society and Daughters of Bilitis approaches to normalize their gay identity. The publications of both groups repeatedly impressed upon their gay constituency the need to adjust to normative standards of proper behavior, persuading gay men and women about the importance of conformity and by minimizing the differences between homosexuality and heterosexuality. However, these representations of the “good gay” or the “normal sex worker” are developed to make a

stigmatized group palatable for the general public. An unintended consequence of this is that these representations construct a sense of “normal” and “deviant,” affecting member’s self-concept and can lead to the policing of behaviors. Additionally, members’ self-concepts can be negatively affected if they do not conform to the “normalized” depiction.

Political Action & Activism

In their article, Campbell and Deacon (2006) suggest that the social effects of stigma become sedimented in the individual psyche in ways that often make it difficult for stigmatized group members to resist their devalued status (p. 411). While some of my interviewees support this theory, others, specifically the sex work activists, seem to turn this theory on its head. Resistance to what Kong (2006) refers to as “macrophysics of power,”⁸⁰ usually takes the form of visible political action through, for example, the unionizing of sex workers as a type of political group. Kong argues that sex workers can and have employed different strategies in order to speak against a specific enemy (e.g., the government), or to change the situation (e.g., the law) or to create a new field (e.g., reclaim a sex worker-tolerant space) (p. 428). There are examples of this in San Francisco, specifically at a legal exotic dance club and peep show, The Lusty Lady, which is the only unionized exotic dance club in the country; the St. James Infirmary, which is very active in various forms of sex workers’ rights activism; and the San Francisco chapter of Sex Workers Outreach Program (SWOP) which also participates in activism. Some of my interviewees participate (or have participated) in activism and have positive feelings towards it. For example, Beatrix (29, Hispanic, female, sexually queer)

⁸⁰ By this, Kong means large, or “macro,” structures of power such as laws.

states, “[y]eah, through the activism I got empowered enough to come out to people in my life and when that happened, I think that that for me was a lot more rewarding to have connections with people based on something that felt like a stronger connection than just, like, we do sex work.” As Beatrix’s quote reveals, the stigma of sex work is challenged by asserting that sex workers have rights.

However, who has access to participate in the political process or to be an activist is based largely on both identity politics and material concerns. Political participation necessitates some form of privilege, whether that is economic, temporal, national, and the like. Therefore, the possibility of resistance and activism, and the forms through which resistance and activism might be expressed, depend very much on the individual sex worker’s subject position. The reality of how one’s subject position influences one’s ability to participate in activism is often overlooked, as Eng (2010) argues: “[o]ur historical moment is defined precisely by new combinations of racial, sexual, and economic disparities—both nationally and globally—which are disavowed, denied, and exacerbated by official state policies that refuse to see inequality as anything but inequality, and by a pervasive language of individualism, personal merit, responsibility, and choice” (p. 5). An example of this is Kai (22, Caucasian, gender neutral, sexually queer) who often feels marginalized within the sex work community: “There’s no services for trans boys, . . . I mean, anybody that I know that’s a trans guy, they’ve got hurt doing sex work, you know? They’ve been beaten up, they’ve been stabbed, they’ve been shot or whatever.” Though many sex workers’ rights organizations are open to include men and transgender participants, and acknowledge multiple masculinities and femininities, overwhelmingly, in the San Francisco Bay Area, the sex work activist

movement is currently comprised of and spear-headed by white, educated females. Yet, as Kai addresses, some members of the sex work community are left to feel unrepresented.⁸¹

Additionally, some sex workers felt intellectually aligned with the activist message of the sex worker rights movement, but did not feel emotionally aligned in the actual work, which creates a difficult space for the sex worker to emotionally navigate. Aaliya (22, Taiwanese and Russian, female, bisexual) explains:

Um, sometimes I feel really, um—like the last scene that I shot, I wasn't really, [laughs] I didn't feel like I had any chemistry with the girl that I shot a scene with, and it was—I felt kinda gross when I went home. But I don't want to tell anybody because the company that I was shooting for was supposed to be really, like, queer and active and positive, [for] sex for women. So, I just told everyone I really enjoyed it. But when I went home I was kind of bummed out.

Aaliya's example indicates that she felt that her voice was muted because it was incongruent with the overall "activist" message that she felt she should represent to be a "good" member of this collective identity. In this respect, upholding the activist message became more important than expressing her true feelings about the work she had just completed, which can skew the reality of sex workers' occupational experiences and malign those who vocalize negative feelings when the group is attempting to construct a "positive" message.

⁸¹ Many of these organizations are self-conscious of their privilege and understand how race or gender facilitates their activism. For example, while at a university presentation given by three members of SWOP, before each member spoke, she acknowledged that she was speaking from "the privileged position of an educated, white, female" or "educated, white, [sexually] queer" sex worker (K. Read, field notes, September, 2012).

Shifting the Discourse

Changing sex work discourse is one tactic to resist the hegemonic cultural system by introducing alternative meanings into that system (de Certeau, 1984). For example, in the sex work community, beginning in the 1990s, there was the co-optation of “whore” (Sprinkle, 1998; Pheterson, 1993; Bell, 2002) in an effort to reclaim the pejorative term and use it as a term of empowerment. The most recent discursive shift is from “prostitution” to “sex work” in an effort to distance the community from the historically gendered and loaded term prostitute and to emphasize the labor aspect of the industry while including a broader range of sex work. According to Taylor (28, Caucasian, gender queer, sexually queer):

A prostitute is a specific type of sex worker. A prostitute is someone, to me, who engages in sex acts. I mean, namely I would say, penetrative sex acts with a client for pay. Whereas a sex worker is just a broad category that can include also, you know, pro-dommes or pro-subbs or strippers, um [pause] erotic massage providers, adult film actors. It’s much more broad... There’s less stigma, I think, attached to “escort” or “sex worker” than there is to “prostitute.”

While this most recent shift in discourse from prostitute to sex worker has been overwhelmingly adopted by the sex work community and academics alike, not all sex workers see the benefit of this new terminology. Beatrix (29, Hispanic, female, sexually queer) explains that the concept of “sex work” is not widely used and therefore, outside of the “occupational subaltern counterpublic,” it is misunderstood. She says: “If I’m talking to regular folks at [my college], or certainly if I’m talking to Latinos, I would

never say, you know, [sex worker]. I would say the word ‘prostitute’ and ‘prostitution.’”

Beatrix also highlights the complexities involved in a discursive shift when she states:

Let’s just call it what it is, you know? Let’s bring in all of the stigmas that [being a sex worker] has because it doesn’t go away just because you change the name...I don’t know if I necessarily agree that “sex worker” is a better term because it doesn’t have that stigma. Because I think that if I use the term “sex work,” and I was still sleeping with men for money, I can’t say that that stigma doesn’t follow me, so I would rather use the term that brings the stigma into the conversation so that we can actually deal with what’s going on.

Taylor and Beatrix’s different feelings toward the terms “prostitution” and “sex work” highlight the complex nature of a shift in discourse and the management of a “deviant” identity as it is connected to a “dirty job” and how members of a collective identity may disagree.

The intention of the discursive shift to “sex worker” or the co-optation of “whore” is to allow the sex work community to distance itself from previous stigmas associated with pejorative terminology and to utilize that new language as a political tool in an effort to reshape the collective identity of the sex work community. An unintended consequence of this is that sex workers are continuously constructing personal identities that are not mere reflections of the stereotypical and stigmatized archetype in which they are regarded as a social category, while also establishing themselves within the emerging activist rhetoric. This is particularly difficult if their personal experiences or ideological views about sex work do not necessarily align with the “party line” of the group.

INDIVIDUAL STRATEGIES FOR CONSTRUCTING POSITIVE SELF-CONCEPTS

While the last section focused on the importance of a group-identity, this section will explore *individual* strategies for constructing a positive self-concept among members of the highly stigmatized sex work community. Positive self-concept is being defined here as a positive overarching view of oneself. To clarify, this does not mean that these sex workers necessarily have positive associations with sex work, though some do, which will be discussed in this section. Rather, these interviewees express a variety of strategies to construct positive self-concepts despite the intense stigma of their “dirty job.” Prevalent individual strategies include: refusing or distancing from the sex worker identity; concealment/passing; adopting the sex worker identity and embracing multiple identities; and the construction of fictive kinships.

Refusing or distancing from the sex worker identity

Some sex workers in my study refuse or distance themselves from the term “sex worker” as a description of their occupation. This is consistent with Sayles (1984) finding that often, when individuals enact roles, associate with others, or utilize institutions that imply social identities inconsistent with their desired self-concept, they may attempt to distance themselves from those roles, associations, and institutions by refusing a specific label. This strategy is prevalent among my interviewees who opted for more ambiguous terminology. For example, my interview with Kai (22, Caucasian, gender neutral, sexually queer):

KR: Do you consider yourself a sex worker? Would you ever use that term to define what you do, or do you say something else?

K: I mean, I'd rather say "hustler;" it doesn't necessary fully explain what you do with your title.

KR: Why do you prefer hustler?

K: 'Cause, um [pause] I mean, "sex worker" people know you're prostituting yourself, and it's bad enough being queer.

Kai's strategy of distancing himself is also utilized by other interviewees who prefer terminology other than "sex worker." For example, Madie (44, African American, female, heterosexual) calls herself a "savvy businesswoman" and states:

I ain't nobodies' ho. I'm particular. I don't want anybody just touching me. So, you know, I'm not promiscuous, but I have friends, like I said, with benefits, and they gonna give me [money] you know, if I ask them, and it's okay with me and it's okay with them.

Similarly, Luke says:

I'm a "professional." I do what I do to survive; there's a difference in that, you know? And I think the term "professional" sounds a lot more friendly; it sounds a lot more, classy. I hate to say it, but "sex worker" makes me think of the streets; it makes me think of, like, Polk Street; it makes me think of standing on a sidewalk, you know, like what I used to do. And [sex worker is] like if somebody would call me a hooker...I think that's a trashy term 'cause it sounds dirty to me. It sounds trashy.

Opting for alternative terminology that is unassociated with sex work, such as "hustler," or "businesswoman," or "professional," can be a form of resistance to a "deviant" identity and an adoption of alternate terminology to instead "normalize" their labor. By

doing this, they resist both the dominant public and the “occupational subaltern counterpublics” attempts to categorize them or their behavior.

Additionally, choosing alternative terminology to describe their labor distances these individuals from the collective identity of sex worker and suggests to them that they are somehow different or exceptional to that group or to the stereotypes associated with that group. As discussed in Chapter 4, these responses highlight some of the stigmas and stereotypes about sex workers that exist *within* the sex work community itself. But, in terms of identity construction, these responses also indicate that some sex workers simply do not align themselves within the collective sex worker identity. Refusing or distancing from the sex worker identity provides an opportunity to set themselves apart from the group as well as the “dirty job,” and develop a positive self-concept utilizing positive or ambiguous terminology. For these individuals, even the discursive shift from “prostitute” to “sex worker” did not result in enough status-gain to merit “sex worker” a desirable identity.

In addition, these three respondents were managing the identity-threat of multiple stigmas. For Kai, “being queer” had resulted in a significant loss of status in conjunction with being a heroin and methadone user, struggling with anxiety, and making approximately \$1,000 per month and receiving government aid; Madie was an African American female who had not completed high school, was formerly a heroin addict and at the time of the interview was using methadone, earning approximately \$1,200 per month and receiving government aid; and Luke was alienated from his family because he was gay. Arguably, each of these individuals felt that the additional stigma of being a sex worker would result in too much additional status loss. By refusing the sex worker

identity and adopting more ambiguous terminology to describe their occupations, each of these individuals was able to maintain a positive self-concept.

One way of distancing from the sex worker identity is, indeed, to refuse the label of “sex worker.” However, individuals could also distance themselves from an identity through their actions, especially if their actions were in direct opposition to the social identity that was imputed upon them. For example, some of the negative and stigmatizing stereotypes about sex workers include notions that they have no sense of self-worth or integrity, thus acting with self-worth and integrity serve as mechanisms to distance oneself from the negative tropes about sex work and aid in constructing a positive self-concept. For example, Kai (22, Caucasian, gender neutral, sexually queer) says:

If somebody’s giving me the right amount of money for [sex work], it’s fine. But if somebody is sitting there offering me fifty dollars to sleep with them, I get really pissed off because, you know, I put myself through college; I have a high school diploma, graduated with honors, you know, I have a good G.P.A through college, and I just find myself worth more than that. ‘Cause people are going to low-ball people in the sex industry; I mean they don’t know what you have to do, you know? It’s frustrating.

Kai, and others within the study, expressed that their feelings of self-worth and value have to align with the services they provide and the amount they are paid. This aids in the production of boundaries with clients as well as a more positive self-concept because their actions connect to a sense of integrity with their work. For example, Frankie (44, African American, female, heterosexual) explains that she often refuses clients’ demands

to have sex without using a condom because her HIV+ status would endanger the client.

She tells me:

So, [being HIV+] didn't stop me from dating, but I had to use condoms. It's a trip how mens date women with HIV, because I tell them [that I'm HIV+] and the first thing they said is I give you a extra \$100 dollars if you don't let me use a condom. It's like, every client I had, I [would say], "I got HIV; I think we need a condom." "Oh no, I don't like condoms; I can't get a hard on. \$150 dollars if you let me not use a condom"...*Every time* I date someone, I tell them, "HIV positive." One man, [pause] he lit up like a Christmas tree laughing and smiled... [He said] "Let me take your blood in a syringe, so I can shoot it in me. I will give you \$300 dollars," I said, "I thought we were dating?" He said, "This is how I date." He said he get off on it. I said, "You get off on what?" [He said] "Taking a syringe and drawing blood from HIV men and women, and I get off on that and then I inject myself." I said, "I can't do that."... He got mad at me 'cause I didn't want to... I said, "I don't want to give [HIV] to you. You might have kids by your wife; I don't want your wife or your kids or your family members to suffer."

For Frankie, who earns approximately \$1,200 per month and receives government aid, creating boundaries like this result in a significant loss of income for her, but working with integrity is more valuable to her positive self-concept.

While sex workers creating boundaries with clients is a well-researched and discussed topic (Edwards, 1993; O'Connell Davidson, 1998; Kelly, 2008), it is interesting to examine how the refusal of participating in specific client demands that do not align with one's self-concept affect an individual's identity construction. Kai is able

to “hustle” only if he feels that the price is commensurate with his personal sense of value and self-worth, and Frankie feels that she acts with integrity by telling clients of her HIV+ status and demanding they use condoms. Additionally, part of her self-concept is predicated on protecting others from becoming HIV+ which becomes a consistent feature in her work—even if it means refusing clients and money. Thus, both Kai and Frankie participate in a form of distancing from the negative sex worker (social) identity by refusing to do work inconsistent with their self-concepts.

Concealment/Passing

An additional strategy for sex workers to construct a positive self-concept is to “pass” by concealing or withholding information about their highly stigmatized “dirty job” so it is not perceived by others.⁸² “Passing’ has been applied discursively to disguises of other elements of an individual’s presumed ‘natural’ or ‘essential’ identity including class, ethnicity, and sexuality as well as gender” (Ginsberg, 1996, p. 3), and I argue that for those in the “occupational subaltern counterpublic” of sex work, passing as a “non-sex worker” aids them in constructing a positive self-concept because it allows others to see them as more than “just” a sex worker—a stigmatizing identity that many interviewees fear will eclipse all other identities such as being a valuable employee or a “good” daughter or parent, for example.

Research documents that attitudes toward sex work are culturally specific (Zheng, 2009a, 2009b; Katsulis, 2009; Kelly, 2008; Weitzer, 2012; Kempadoo & Doezma, 1999), and as previous chapters have documented, in the United States, and in San Francisco

⁸² There are myriad forms and reasons for passing, and a significant amount of research is devoted to passing for race, sexuality, gender, and economic status to name just a few (e.g., Ginsberg, 1996; Pfeiffer, 2003; Fordham, 1993). This section of the chapter is meant to be a brief overview of how passing can contribute to a positive self-concept for sex workers.

specifically, there are criminalizing and pathologic stigmas that contribute to a negative climate toward sex workers that is so pervasive, it even exists within the sex work community. Because of this, many sex workers in my study opt to pass as non-sex workers and achieve this through withholding information about their sex worker status from employers, friends, and/or family members.

Several sex workers within the study work “straight” jobs and use sex work to supplement that income. Straight jobs provide some sex workers a cover story for friends and family but also create additional fears about employers finding out about their sex work. For example, Luke works in a retail position, and he uses that as his “passing” story with his friends and family, but Tracy, who just completed her Master’s degree in child psychology and is seeking a career in that field, fears her future employers finding out about her sex work. As Tracy indicates, sometimes passing takes extremely thoughtful measures:

I escort as well, and I’m not doing it right now because of complications with my child psychology work and a [child psychology job] review board that put my information up [on the internet] with my picture...So, basically I go to New York a few times a year, and I escort while I’m there. That’s my recent model of doing escorting, because I feel like if the child psychology world finds out ...I’m a prostitute, that’s kind of a career-ender, so I’ve decided to be more careful about that and not have my ad up in the Bay Area.

Although Tracy tells many of her friends about her sex work, and has positive feelings about being a sex worker, she fears the consequences of potential future employers finding out that she belongs to this stigmatized “occupational subaltern counterpublic”

proving that “wherever there is prejudice and preconception, there is passing” (Kroeger, 2003, p. 4). Passing helps Tracy continue sex work, which she very much enjoys, and potentially reach her goal of becoming a child psychologist—two things that contribute to her positive self-concept.

However, passing because of a fear of losing their “straight” job is just one of many reasons that sex workers conceal their occupational identity. Some sex workers expressed that they pass with friends and family because they do not want their family members burdened with worry. For example, Lily (44, Native American, female, bisexual) states, “I decided a long time ago that, well, I think that my mom could handle it, but all it would do is worry her and, you know, she’s 70. I don’t need to worry her.” Not telling her mother about her sex work also aids in Lily’s positive self-concept because to her, this is the act of a “good” daughter. Similarly, Beatrix (29, Hispanic, female, sexually queer) explains, “[Sex work is] like the last thing that my parents would ever suspect me doing, so um [pause] they just have this image of me as somebody who is responsible and put together and to them, that does not connect to prostitution.” For Beatrix, it is important that her family maintain their idea of her as “responsible” which, in turn, aids in her positive self-concept.⁸³ However, while the strategy of passing assists some sex workers in constructing a positive self-concept, many confess that it also contributes to isolating them from those who do not know their “authentic” identities. Beatrix sums up what many respondents also articulate: “Part of what was difficult for

⁸³ While Lily and Beatrix both use passing as a strategy for their self-concept, it is likely that they, and others, do not only pass for themselves but that there is a genuine reluctance to disappoint others or bring shame to their families.

me in doing sex work was the having to lie to my family about what I was doing, and it created kind of this distance.”

There is also the legal reality of participating in a criminalized occupation that made passing a desirable option for some sex workers in my study. Some feel concealing their sex worker status necessary due to a fear of arrest or of losing custody of their children. For example, Savannah (29, African American, female, bisexual), who has two small children, does not want to tell her family about her sex worker status “[b]ecause if I tell my family, they’re going to try call CPS or something.” Savannah’s fear articulates a long-standing stereotype that being a sex worker and being a good mother are incompatible.⁸⁴ As these examples indicate, many of my interviewees conceal their sex worker identity in an effort to pass, yet successful passing is not without emotional consequences.

Adopt a Sex Worker Identity and/or Multiple Identities

With the discursive shift from “prostitute” to “sex worker,” theoretically sex workers are empowered to embrace a less pejorative identity that instead highlights their labor. For Camille (42, African American, MTF transgender, heterosexual), this resonates and she states: “It was work. It wasn’t something that I really enjoyed doing, but I knew I could make money at it.” Billie (23, Hispanic, gender queer, sexually queer) agreed, saying: “I feel like ‘escort’ or ‘ho’ or things like that, it’s just pretty much about sex. Where I think ‘sex worker’ implies that there’s more work being done, other than sex. And so that’s why I was interested in that term.” Camille and Billie both articulate that acknowledging the labor involved in sex work is an important component of constructing

⁸⁴ For an extended discussion of this, see Dewey, 2011.

a positive self-concept because it removes the morality of the “dirty job” and instead focuses on the service provided.

Additionally, for some, identifying as a “sex worker” allows for a more complex identity than someone who just exchanges sex for money—rather, being a “sex worker” adds an element of social awareness and political activism: “Taking that on—taking on being a sex worker as an identity, and as kind of a political vehicle and a social vehicle, ended up being more than me just being a hooker, you know? And I think that was really important to me. That really changed a lot” (Billie, 23, Hispanic, gender queer, sexually queer). So, for some, being a sex *worker* aids in constructing an identity that is more complex than “just being a hooker” and relieves them of some of the stigmatizing stereotypes associated with that “dirty job.” With this discursive shift and the political activism implicit within that shift, there can also be an element of status gained by being a sex worker: “I suppose I’d say I socialize mostly within a queer female body community in San Francisco, and I feel that being a sex worker, in certain circles, carries with it a certain amount of prestige” (Taylor, 28, Caucasian, gender queer, sexually queer). Thus, as a sex worker, one can adopt a political stance and use their sex worker status as a means of activism that aligns with the positive message of the “occupational subaltern counterpublic,” while simultaneously supporting the construction of a positive self-concept.

Yet, even for those who embrace the identity of a sex worker and find that it aids them in constructing a positive self-concept either due to feeling politically or socially active or garnering a sense of prestige, I did not have one interviewee who disclosed to everyone in their life that are a sex worker. Some interviewees did not share their

occupation with anyone, some shared their occupation with a select few people in their lives, and very few stated that they shared their sex worker status with many people. This suggests that even though some sex workers proudly adopt the identity of sex worker as a political tool or as a strategy of constructing a positive self-concept, sex work is still such a highly stigmatized occupation that, at least on some level, participants in this “occupational subaltern counterpublic” feel that it often needs to be concealed so as not to taint their social identity.

Some of my interviewees were quick to point out that their occupation was but a small part of their overall identity and self-concept. For example, Beatrix’s (29, Hispanic, female, sexually queer) quote at the beginning of this chapter establishes that some sex workers in my study see themselves having much more complex identities than simply being a “sex worker.” She explains: “My identity is very complex, and I have multiple identities.” This sentiment was shared by other sex workers who feel beyond identity or feel that traditional identity categories fail to align with their self-concept:

I don’t know if I put a label on myself. In fact, I don’t think I do put a label on myself...And I think that’s one of the things I like about myself. I don’t feel like I fit in a category. So, I don’t, um, react or act because of being transgender or being a person of color. That’s not what I lead with. If you want to like me, you like me [laughing] (Kaylie, 66, multi-racial, MTF transgender, heterosexual).

For both Beatrix and Kaylie, who have wrestled with multiple oppressions and stigmas, it is commensurate that, unable to find adequate categories or identities with which to align themselves, they opt out of categories all together, believing that “I am beyond identity at this point” (Beatrix).

Construction of fictive kinship models

Many communities invoke fictive kinships and most studies among these communities argue that “[i]n each case [fictive kin] are a valued resource enabling individuals to meet specific needs” (Mac Rae, 1992, p. 228). Different types of fictive kinships models were discussed within my interviews as an additional strategy used to construct a positive self-concept. These fictive kinships models vary greatly, ranging from more “formal” fictive kinship structures (such as the queer family within the drag community and the kinship model of street-based sex workers)⁸⁵ to more informal support networks of friends. For example, Billie (23, Hispanic, gender queer, sexually queer) states: “My family, my queer family, [pause] it’s people that look like me, you know, and feel like me. They have the same politics that I do, and we understand where we are with each other... Friends are great, and they’re fun...like, I love my friends, but I wouldn’t give my kidney to just anyone, you know? [laughs].” Billie’s comment about giving his kidney, while a joke, is also significant because it highlights notions of reciprocity and obligation within fictive kinship structures. Damian (27, Caucasian and Hispanic, FTM transgender, gay) echoes Billie’s sentiment that his queer family is a specific and special fictive kinship structure: “I definitely have a queer family, which involves housemates and really close friends who have also been sex workers and people I’ve dated.” For Billie and Damian, each of whom have tenuous relationships with their biological families, belonging to a fictive kin structure allows them to be surrounded by individuals who share their politics, including identity politics, and even a sex worker

⁸⁵ For an extended discussion of fictive kinships among street-based sex workers, see K. Read, in press.

identity which for both of them, develops a framework where kin terminology is used as an identity making strategy.

Throughout Frankie's (44, African American, female, heterosexual) tenure as a sex worker, she had been involved in various fictive kinship structures, including a more formalized street-based kinship that utilized familial terminology when she had a pimp: "I was is his wife in-law, and he was 'big daddy,'" to her more recent informal kinship network of other HIV+ sex workers. She explains their relationship:

We been knowin' each other for a long time... we was in a [Narcotics Anonymous] program together. We used to work the [Tenderloin] together. We got clean and sober together, and we went to jail together. So, we just decided to see the same social worker. But we don't cross that friendship [by] trying to compete with each other [for dates] on the same day. One day they go, and the next day I go out, you know. If she don't have the money, I have some, I share with her 'cause she didn't work that week 'cause she feel bad, 'cause she HIV positive. I go buy groceries or give her some money. She do the same for me. It's like that. It's not like we in competition with each other; we more like sisters.

Frankie provides a good example that with the designation of fictive kin status comes both respect and responsibility, and fictive kin are expected to participate in the duties of the extended family (Chatters, Taylor, & Akers, 1994, p. 297). One can theorize that these duties and loyalties are compounded when the fictive kin structure operates within a criminalized "occupational subaltern counterpublic" which necessitates additional protections for its members. Thus, fictive kinships provide an added means of distancing

and isolation from the dominant culture that is represented in both practice and terminology.

While multiple types of fictive kinships, ranging from formal to informal, were discussed within the interviews, nearly all of them use kin terminology as an identity-making strategy, allowing sex workers to participate in a family structure that accepts all axes of their identity, including their sex worker status, and allows them access to an identity beyond “sex worker” which also aids in the construction of a positive self-concept.

NEGATIVE SELF-CONCEPT

This section will explore why some members of my study had negative self-concepts that are a result of their labor as sex workers. To clarify, this does not necessarily mean that they *refuse* the sex worker identity (as others did previously in this chapter). Rather, these are interviewees who express shame and disgust toward sex work and toward themselves for being sex workers. They express feelings of physical, social, and moral taint because of their labor and do not feel positively toward the collective identity of sex work. For example, Tasia (23, African American, female, heterosexual) explains: “[Clients] don’t look at you. It’s just like, ‘Okay, here you go. Let’s get down to it.’ I mean, they might be looking at you, but they’re not seeing you. You’re just...a hollow shell...It’s really, really demeaning, and they do look at you like you’re a piece of meat.” And Leah agrees: “Now, living to be 46 years old, going through the things I went through, um, some people may disagree, but I mean, to me, honestly, sex work is degrading.”

As discussed in Chapter 4, an individual can suffer from multiple stigmas, and thus, multiple oppressions, and “faced with multiple layers of social disadvantage, it may be difficult for people to challenge their stigmatized status” (Campbell & Deacon, 2006, p. 413). Therefore, in this section, I argue below that those individuals with less access to Snow and Anderson’s (1987), four activities of identity work: (1) the arrangement of physical settings and props; (2) cosmetic face work or the arrangement of personal appearance; (3) selective association with other people or social groups; and (4) identity talk that includes “fictive story-telling,” “distancing,” and “embracement,” (p. 1348) due specifically to their class, are in effect, “classed out” of sex worker activist discourse and this contributes to their negative self-concept.

As previous chapters have established, there is a long history of exclusion and stigma associated with sex work: “Selling sexual services, often an occasional or part-time activity, did not provide an identity. Women who sold sex had a difficult life, but they lived within communities. By the late nineteenth century, helping projects had isolated these women, giving them totally negative identity” (Augustín, 2010, p. 127). Arguably, the sex worker rights’ movement also, inadvertently, contributes to an “othering” of economically disadvantaged sex workers that both isolates them and contributes to their negative self-concept because they cannot fully participate in the strategies to create a positive self-concept.

The inability to arrange physical settings and props

Generally speaking, due to their stigmatized and criminalized labor, sex workers have less control over the physical settings where they work and “props,” which I am using here to mean condoms, lubrication, and other harm reduction tools and strategies.

In Nevada, for example, where sex work is legal in some counties, sex workers have the opportunity to work within a legal brothel that offers a safety gate, video surveillance of customers, safety buzzers within each room, and some brothels have a full-time or part-time security guard.⁸⁶ Beds, clean sheets, private rooms (often rooms decorated by the sex worker themselves), condoms and lubrication (as well as sex toys) are all available for legal, registered sex workers without fear of arrest.

Yet, when sex workers work in an illegal environment that is further compounded by their being homeless or poor, they have less control over their physical settings and “props”—and for many people in my study, this meant they work wherever they can, often for whatever money they can earn, with or without harm reduction supplies. Chris (50, African American, male, heterosexual but questioning) who is also homeless explains: “You know, uh, [pause] things you wouldn’t normally consider you [pause] you give consideration. You think about it, and it’s like I said, the need of money makes it easier to justify doing it, you know?” Abby, (33, Hispanic, MTF transgender, same gender loving) who earns approximately \$1,000 per month and receives government aid, also reiterates the dangers of having less control over her physical work environment: “Doing dates outside, too, can leave you open to get robbed and stuff, ‘cause that has happened [to me], people just open the [car] door during the a date and try to take my purse [and push me out of the car].”

⁸⁶ Brothels were legalized in 1971 under Nevada Revised Statute 224.245, which legalized “dancing halls, escort services, entertainment by referral services and gambling games or devices; limitations on licensing of houses of prostitution” (Nevada Revised Statutes, 2009). It was not until 1980 that the Supreme Court ruled that counties with less than 400,000 people could regulate and license brothels, and in 1987 the Nevada Revised Statutes made non-brothel prostitution explicitly illegal.

Both Chris and Abby do some street work, some in-call/out-call escort work, and have some regulars, but the problems they face when not working in ideal conditions are, in part, dictated by their class status. Yet, for some sex workers, like Taylor (28, Caucasian, gender queer, sexually queer) who operate in a higher socioeconomic class, there is access to safer labor options and a greater feeling of agency and control of physical settings and “props.”⁸⁷ For example, Taylor says, “[w]ell, a big reason why I feel safe is that I do this out of my house. I don’t ever go to people’s houses.” Taylor has the economic means to afford a house to work out of and is therefore able to create a safe space for his sex work. This is in contrast to Chris, again who is homeless, and states, “[y]ou got to do what you got to do to survive in San Francisco.” Thus, class status precludes some sex workers from having the same amount of control over their physical setting and props, and this contributes both to their lack of physical safety and negative self-concept.

Without cosmetic face work or the arrangement of personal appearance

Some sex workers who are economically disadvantaged and homeless cannot afford to put money toward their personal appearance and this can negatively impact their self-concept. Maya (25, Chinese and Caucasian, female, heterosexual) is homeless and explains her daily ritual trying to access make-up: “When I wake up, um, I steal food from Starbucks, then I go to Sephora and get my face on.”⁸⁸ I put my makeup on at

⁸⁷ Though Taylor earns approximately \$700 per month from sex work, he is fully financially supported by his family’s wealth. Additionally, Taylor holds a Master’s degree and lives in a large home, all markers of a higher socioeconomic status.

⁸⁸ Sephora is a beauty-retail store that allows customers to try makeup, perfume, and other beauty product samples throughout the store (Sephora, 2013).

Sephora after I eat. I'm a regular; I go there [almost] every day." Additionally, recent weight gain as a result of a pregnancy also contributed to her negative self-concept:

I am normally like 130 [pounds]; I'm like 160 [pounds], and it's fucked up. Maybe I don't make money 'cause no one wants a fat bitch, you know? It's fucked up my self-esteem; it's just [pause] when I find out I'm pregnant, I stop using drugs, and then I can't stop eating. I just let myself go 'cause food is the drug of choice [but then] I'm not really fuckable anymore. Undesirable.

For Maya, feeling like she has less control over her physical appearance has an extremely negative effect on her self-concept in part because she feels like it directly impacts her earning power. Because their labor is so closely associated with their physical body image, feeling negatively about their personal appearance is particularly difficult for some sex workers. Chris echoes Maya's sentiments:

I'm going bald, you know. I'm missing all these teeth. I got the moles on my face, uh [pause] I'm 50. The days are numbered, you know. That's one thing about people who do sex work; as you get older, if you can't afford to have the plastic surgery done, then you gonna retire quickly 'cause [clients] just stop coming around.

For Chris, his inability to present the personal appearance that he desires, due to an inability to finance cosmetic or dental surgery, is compounded by his age, all of which contribute to his negative self-concept.

Billie (23, Hispanic, gender queer, sexually queer), whose income ranges from \$2,000-\$2,300 per month, and who has an overall positive self-concept, explains that it can be a challenge to develop positivity around his physical appearance, but it is also

necessary in his occupation: “Through sex work, you really have to learn how to be body positive. And you have to end up loving your body. You have to. And I’ve never been a twink, like, a really skinny twink, so I had to be okay with being fat, you know?”

However, Billie’s income affords him the opportunity to access a gym membership, often have his nails painted, and have elaborate drag costumes that include very expensive make up. For those interviewees who cannot afford that kind of cosmetic face work or arrangement of their personal appearance, it contributes to a negative self-concept.

Additionally, some transgender sex workers in my study did not have the economic means to begin hormone therapy under a doctor’s supervision with the addition of counseling to explain the expected changes in their appearance and emotional health. Instead, they began hormone therapy in jail, with little to no supervision, and the results were often very confusing, like for Abby (33, Hispanic, MTF transgender, same gender loving) and Kendra (53, Caucasian, MTF transgender, queer):

KR: Let’s talk about your transition a little bit. When did that start?

A: Um [pause], it started when I went to jail, and I noticed other people were taking hormones, and they thought that I should be on hormones, and I remember I would do drag a lot. I would dress up like a girl a lot. But I was never on hormones. And finally, I went to prison, and another girlfriend told me to tell the doctor that I wanted hormones, and I did. I told the doctor that I wanted hormones, and I took hormones there and the men in jail, they loved it and I, I kind of did too, but when I got out, it freaked me out a little bit.

KR: Why?

A: Just the changes that I saw on my face and my complexion and my hair. I had developed breasts and stuff, and I wasn't sure I was going to look like that. And then I started to like it and understand it more, um [pause] it's still a process.

Kendra had a similar experience, and began her hormone therapy in jail as well, without the supervised care of a doctor or any counseling.

K: The last time I went to jail they asked me [if I was transgender], I told them I was trans, and they asked me if I wanted hormones, and I said, "Yeah, give me hormones." So, I got my hormones in jail with no lab work, no education on them or anything.

KR: Did they explain how to use them or any side effects or expectations or anything?

K: No, they just took my word that I took them on the street, which I didn't... And it was kind of an experience because you don't have mirrors in jail. I was in jail for six months taking hormones and extra hormones that the other girls would give me, and so I started to change, and I had a bus ticket to come back [to San Francisco from San Diego]. And when I got out, I didn't even know what restroom to use on the outs. I didn't know none of that. I was scared. I was at the bus terminal, I didn't know what to do, so I, I just used the women's restroom anyway. My hair wasn't very long, and I looked in the mirror 'cause what I had on was just a t-shirt and a windbreaker and that's what I got arrested in. I saw that my breasts were starting to grow and I just literally freaked 'cause I didn't understand or nothing.

KR: So, once you started taking the hormones, and you saw yourself for the first time, how did that make you feel about transitioning?

K: It felt right, but it was confusing because I didn't understand, you know? I didn't understand...taking the pills and knowing what the pills are going to do to you is totally different. It's like, sure, your body is gonna change but then the emotional change and the body change is, if you're not prepared for it or know or been counseled. It's like, it's hard. It was real hard. I got up here in San Francisco and didn't know nobody and I was you know...I wasn't passable yet. I didn't feel like I fit in anywhere.

For both Abby and Kendra, their gender transition began in jail, which classed them out of access to comprehensive medical care and, at least initially, contributed to a negative/confusing self-concept regarding their gender transitions.

Without selective associations with other people or social groups

Some of the sex workers in my study had less control over the people or groups with whom they associate because the nature of their work was illegal, leaving them open to arrest and thereby forced into association with specific groups. For Kendra (53, Caucasian, MTF transgender, sexually queer), who earned approximately \$1,500 per month when we interviewed (but less early in her career), being arrested was particularly dangerous for her as a low-earning MTF transgender sex worker. She explains:

Uh, it was really, really hard when I first got arrested because I was dressed female and I was arrested. I was taken to a holding tank and threw in with a bunch of guys [pause] which was really hard [pause]...Finally, they had to take me out because it was getting to be sexual innuendos and fights. So, they put me into a

room by myself; then they took me upstairs to undress with all the guys. You know, they put me in a dorm with guys, some of them that I undressed with and of course the rumors flew all over the dorm in the pods, which wasn't easy. I was kinda, like, ostracized.

Because she was arrested as a low-earning MTF transgender sex worker, without the funds to post bond, Kendra's control over who she would selectively associate with and any sense of physical safety had been forfeited.

For some of the sex workers in my study, associating with a specific social group, such as sex workers or transgender individuals, excludes them from the associations of people or groups that they would like to have relationships with, most commonly, their families. Chris (50, African American, heterosexual but questioning) explains his feelings of isolation because of his sex worker status:

Yeah, I mean, when I do go to family functions, you know, with my [grown sons] and stuff, I can't sit up and talk about this with them because they all, they work, they have good jobs, and they have homes and things. Talking about this type of stuff with them would only alienate me even more from them. So yeah, these are some of the things that I just have to keep bottled up inside, you know. Keep it protected. Although a lot of times I feel like it's not worth protecting.

Chris's quote is interesting because it suggests that his association with certain groups (being homeless, being a former drug addict, and being a sex worker) contribute toward "alienating" him from other groups, such as his family, of which he would like to be a part. Though his family knows of his drug history and is aware of his homelessness, none know about his occupation as a sex worker—it is too highly stigmatizing. His family

knowing would result in too much (additional) status loss. In turn, he has to conceal that aspect of his identity because he fears the taint associated with being a sex worker will further “alienate” him from his sons, contributing to a negative self-concept.

Due to their social class, some of the sex workers in my study had less control over the people or groups with whom they associate. The criminalized nature of sex work sometimes put them in the position of being arrested and forced into physically dangerous situations in jail. Additionally, relationships with people that some sex workers associate with, like family, are often influenced by the stigma of their “dirty job.” A fear of revealing the nature of their work results in feelings of isolation and inauthenticity, and all of this can contribute to a negative self-concept.

Identity talk

Perhaps the one element of Snow and Anderson’s (1987) four activities of identity work that all sex workers in my study can access, regardless of class status, is “identity talk that includes ‘fictive story-telling,’ ‘distancing,’ and ‘embracement’” (p. 1348). This strategy operates differently than the others because it can be employed by all sex workers; however, the effectiveness of this strategy varies depending on individual’s social capital. For example, “fictive story-telling” or “distancing” or “embracement” may be believed if it appears congruent with one’s social capital and dismissed if it does not. Tracy (27, Caucasian, female, sexually queer) is one example of this. While Tracy’s parents found out about her sex work when she was 17, she told them she quit when she entered college out of fear that they would not financially support her. She says: “I’m kind of currently struggling with the question of am I ever going to tell—now that we have healed this relationship, and we’re close now—am I ever going to tell [my mom]

that I never stopped doing sex work in college when I said I did?” Instead, she regularly engages in “fictive story-telling” about how she earns money to support herself when speaking with her parents. But for Tracy, her white, middle-class privilege, coupled with her Master’s degree, earns her adequate social capital to convince her family that she is no longer a sex worker. The opposite was experienced by Abby (33, Hispanic, MTF transgender, same gender loving) who states that even before she began sex work, her family believed that was how she earned her money. She explains:

KR: At that point, had you begun sex work yet?

A: No. But I had been accused of it by my parents. They thought that I was.

KR: Why did they think that?

A: I’m not sure why [pause]. Well, I would steal sometimes, and I would shop lift and stuff, and I would have money, and my mom wasn’t sure how I was getting money and she would assume it was sex work; she didn’t think it was from me stealing.

In this example, Abby’s lower-class status, coupled with her emerging transgender status, and drug dependency impacted her “believability,” and she did not have enough social capital to convince her family that she was not a sex worker.

As established in earlier chapters, the stigma associated with sex work is central to a long history of “othering”: “The prostitute body was mapped—marked out and defined—as a distinct body, and ‘the prostitute’ was actively produced as a marginalized social-sexual identity, particularly during the latter half of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century” (Bell, 1994, p. 40). But all sex workers’ bodies are not “marked out” equally—some hold more or less social capital. Inhabiting a raced or

gendered body, regardless of class or occupation, is subject to daily discrimination as part of socializing the “other” as less-than. This means that although the sex workers in my study could access “fictive story-telling,” “distancing,” and “embracement” as a means of constructing a positive self-concept, this access (and their subsequent believability) was disparate, and ultimately, even if they utilized this strategy, it was not enough for some to construct a positive self-concept.

CONCLUSION

This analysis of sex worker identity construction demonstrates the multiplicity and complexity of identity negotiations in sex workers’ every day lived realities. Identity is important, and it is something that many of the sex workers in my interviews consciously think about. As this chapter demonstrates, for some, “sex worker” is a sociocultural category that people inhabit either because they feel aligned with it as an identity or because it is an identity assigned to them (through arrests, for example). Utilizing social identity theory highlights how sex workers’ identity constructions are specifically affected by the physical, social, and moral taint of their occupations because conceptions of the self are at least partly grounded in the perceptions of others. Additionally, considering sex work an “occupational subaltern counterpublic” makes state sanctioned programs, such as juvenile hall, mandated rehabilitation, jail/prison, apparent examples of social structures designed construct a sense of “normal” and “deviant” behavior that affect sex workers’ self-concept. It also highlights that oppressed occupational groups can affect change within the dominant public while maintaining an independent collective identity. My study indicates, however, that not all members can access that identity equally.

The sex workers in my study are constantly participating in complex identity work in an effort to create, present or sustain personal identities that are congruent with their self-concepts. These identities are greatly influenced by the group identity of sex workers in the San Francisco Bay Area as well, and many sex workers who feel part of a collective identity of a “community” of sex workers have positive self-concepts that are reinforced by messages within the sex work activist community. Various strategies are employed to construct and maintain a positive self-concept, including: refusing a sex worker identity; concealment/passing; adopting the sex worker identity; embracing multiple identities; and constructing fictive kinships. However, constructing a positive self-concept is not without a cost—sometimes that cost was literally monetary (e.g., for some sex workers who create client boundaries and therefore lost business) and for others the cost was emotional (e.g., “passing” to family members or friends, creating emotional distance).

Some of the sex workers in my study have feelings of physical, social, and moral taint because their socioeconomic class status precludes them from having access to Snow and Anderson’s (1987) four activities of identity work. This suggests that Snow and Anderson’s theory could be modified to include an important intersectional dimension that would expand its analytic capabilities. Because of their inability to access the strategies that Snow and Anderson suggest, some sex workers did not feel positively toward the collective or individual identity of sex worker. Their negative feelings were incongruent with the message of the sex workers’ rights movement, so their experiences were often inadvertently muted among sex work activist discourse, contributing further to their negative self-concept. This is problematic for the sex workers’ rights movement

because it does not address the complexity of sex worker experiences and identity constructions based on the various sex work stigmas—which could actually strengthen its message. Those who have a negative self-concept, unfortunately, lack the economic bandwidth and resources to collectively pursue an activist agenda of their own, and remain underrepresented and muted within the movement.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Understanding discourse and stigma

This study explored the complex history between medical, religious and legal ideologies, social and economic conditions and access to power that have influenced perceptions of sex work based on who did or did not have access to the public sphere. Establishing this was an important first step in constructing my argument that there are dangerous implications for how sex workers have been (historically and presently) discursively constructed. Previous research on sex work stigma takes this discourse for granted as simply a rhetorically gendered division of language and labor. However, I have demonstrated that exclusion from the public sphere is based on various intersectional identities and has complex effects on marginalized groups, such as sex workers. This has resulted in status loss and the cultural dehumanization of sex workers which contributes greatly to the stigma associated with their labor.

The implications of this are that sex work is performed within a broader system of unequal power structures that construct and perpetuate stigma. This study has demonstrated that stigma inhibits sex workers from individually demanding and receiving the protections that they deserve. While I agree that the circulation of discourses and the knowledge-production to which they contribute create structures of power, I have demonstrated that intersectional identities make some sex workers more or less vulnerable to these power structures. Though exclusion from the contemporary public sphere has allowed for misrepresentations of sex workers to freely circulate, it also created the opportunity for counterpublics to emerge and generate new discourse.

Specifically, as feminist counterpublics emerged within the public sphere, two prevailing and opposing discourses about sex work developed: the sex radical feminists and the liberal feminists. I argue that the sex radical stance of abolishing sex work has neither eliminated supply nor demand. Abolition is unrealistic to enforce and does not address the greater structural and economic issues that make sex work an attractive option for those with less access to alternatives or other resources. Further, the sex radical stance refuses to acknowledge male or transgender sex workers or female clients of sex workers, which constructs a skewed and myopic argument that does not address the reality and complexity of sex work. As I have demonstrated, sex radical discourse contributes to the stigma of both the group and individual sex workers who face daily risks of harassment, physical and sexual violence, isolation, and incarceration. It also interferes with an individual's right to choose sex work as a viable option for survival or as an economic resource.

Therefore, the liberal feminist stance of decriminalization of sex work is recommended because increased policing (such as with the condom as evidence law) leads to more fear, hostility, and unsafe labor practices by the most vulnerable sex workers. Until sex work is decriminalized, police violence, whether discursive, physical or sexual, should not be tolerated, and upon a sex workers' arrest, the sex worker should be offered a social service advocate who also ensures that if the sex worker is transgender, the sex worker will be placed in a safe holding cell. I do not necessarily think decriminalization is without complications or contradictions, but I do think it is the best immediate and foreseeable option for sex workers. I recognize this is simply the first step because sex work is:

a varied and complex phenomenon, experienced differently by those who participate in it, and because it is marked by intricate, overlapping, and systemic power relations that reach beyond gender inequality, it is not easy to plot a straight path to the improvement of the lives of sex workers and the conditions under which they labor. (Kelly, 2008, p. 210)

Yet, I firmly believe that legalizing sex work is not the appropriate response because it simply divides sex workers into those whose activities are state sanctioned and highly controlled, and those whose work is illegal and therefore subject to arrest. This does not diminish stigma, rather, it perpetuates it in a different way. Decriminalization acts as a step toward reducing stigma.

An additional step toward reducing stigma is the emergence of the sex work “occupational subaltern counterpublic” which generates discourse through activist groups within San Francisco. I demonstrated that because of San Francisco’s distinct history, geography, and demographics, there is a unique climate for the emergence of a sex work counterpublic, which I have shown to be a positive impact of stigma. Sex workers’ rights organizations, including St. James Infirmary in San Francisco, have politically organized to challenge existing social norms and inequalities that stigmatize sex workers, and I agree that any reform around sex workers’ rights, health, and safety must include sex workers’ voices.

Reject the binaries

An incorporation of the voices of sex workers will also help to diminish popular binaries within sex work research. Much sex work research is predicated on binaries of male/female, indoor/outdoor, and the like. This kind of the comparative research,

however, does not acknowledge the complex overlapping spaces between those binaries. For example, my study demonstrates that the prevalent male/female binary where sex work is a female service sold to a male clientele is limiting. Including male and transgender sex workers in the research offers a more accurate picture of the realities and challenges of sex work and uncovers additional power structures and multiple oppressions. To date, research about transgender sex workers is overwhelmingly based on MTF transgender, and I suggest a greater focus on FTM and gender queer sex workers who, as my study demonstrates, often feel doubly marginalized and lack social services.

Another popular binary within sex work research focuses on indoor versus outdoor venues, and my study demonstrated that many sex workers work from various venues as part of a rational and economic decision making process. Additionally, my findings demonstrated that “indoor” and “outdoor” workers are not a homogenous group, and the resources of sex workers differ depending on their social capital, therefore the ways they manage risks also differ. Criminalization of some types of sex work and not others (e.g., pornography or peep show dancing) coupled with race/ethnicity and class status can greatly impact how some sex workers respond to risk and what resources are available to them (such as assistance from coworkers or police). My study found that these resources are less likely to be accessed by the most marginalized of the sex work community (e.g., street-based, racially or ethnically marginalized, drug using/abusing, transgender). My findings also demonstrated that it is misleading to apply research that addresses narrow groups of sex workers (for example, female street-based workers) to the larger population because their experiences of increased policing and entrapment do not necessarily reflect the broader street-based culture. The reliance on binaries within sex

work research reproduces skewed data and perpetuates various sex work stereotypes and ultimately stigmas. My study has demonstrated how these connect and overlap to influence the identity construction of both the group and individuals involved in sex work.

Identity construction

This study demonstrated that conceptions of the self and one's identity are at least partly grounded in the perceptions of others and that those with a more tainted and less prestigious occupation, such as sex workers, face the challenge of constructing a positive self-concept. Though members of the sex work community have to participate in additional identity work due to the extreme identity threat of their occupation, a number of group and individual strategies have emerged to aid in constructing a positive collective identity and positive individual self-concepts.

However, my study indicates that the use of traditional strategies to gain entrance into the dominant public sphere, as seen in the St. James Infirmary's media campaign, impacts both the identity construction of the group and of the individual. Yet, I remain ambivalent about how marginalized communities can more effectively emerge into the dominant public. Yes, using strategies that construct sex workers as "normative" and "palatable" for the general public can have the unintended consequence of further marginalizing those within the community who do not adhere to such standards, but having *some* voice, *some* representation of sex workers within the discourse seems better than the traditionally muted alternative.

My study demonstrated that ultimately not all sex workers are able to construct a positive self-concept because they cannot access the necessary strategies. The one

strategy that all sex workers can access, identity talk, operates differently for individuals based on their social capital meaning the success of identity talk on constructing a positive self-concept varies greatly. The implications of this are that some sex workers have a negative self-concept and their negative self-concept is incongruent with the positive group identity that activist organizations aim to construct. Thus the voices of those with a negative self-concept are often muted within the activist discourse, contributing further to their negative self-concept. Therefore, sex workers' rights organizations need to acknowledge discourses of trauma and vulnerability as well as agency and choice.

Final thoughts: Emotion in research

Sex work is a difficult topic to research for a number of ethical and methodological reasons. It is also difficult on an emotional level, something that, as scientists, we are not supposed to necessarily discuss. Admittedly, at times, this study was emotionally challenging. It felt futile to be thinking about Habermas or Foucault when the person sitting across from me in an interview had not eaten for three days or when a young woman pulled up her sleeve to show me her scars from cutting. It felt thrilling to be invited to a strip club to watch a performance or to be shown the red massage table in a private room in an otherwise ordinary looking East Bay apartment. It felt strangely flattering to be offered a job by a madam “[i]f that teaching thing doesn’t work out.” It felt confusing to be handed a leather whip, that was heavy and course in my hands and told, “Go ahead, give it a crack,” and when I did, I could only think about the number of people who had caught that whip’s end.

But this is sex work. All of this, and so much more, is sex work. Realistically, what this study taught me most, and that I aimed to demonstrate, is that sex work *is* connected to high theory, and it is our obligation as researchers and scientists to connect theory to praxis and to the humanity of our subjects. It is also our obligation to do this with the understanding that whether you agree or disagree with my theorizing, my main goal is to truthfully represent the voices of those who I studied while *moving the conversation forward*.

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APPENDIX A
PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

GENDER

Male:	8
Female:	11
Transgender/ genderqueer: ⁸⁹	12
<i>MTF</i>	8
<i>FTM</i>	3
Decline to state:	0

RACE AND ETHNICITY

White:	9
Hispanic:	4
African American:	10
Other/ Bi-Racial/ Multi-racial:	7
Decline to state:	1

AGE

18-25	5
26-35	10
36-45	7
46-55	7
56-65	1
66+	1
Decline to State:	0

SEX WORKER STATUS

Independent:	25
Independent/ supporting partner:	4
“Managed”:	2
Decline to state:	0

EDUCATION RANGE

Non-completion of high school:	5
High school grad:	8
Some college or Assoc. degree:	11
Bachelors:	4
Masters:	3
Decline to state:	0

⁸⁹ Of the 12 interviewees who self-identified as “transgender” or “genderqueer,” 11 had made attempts to transition including hormone therapy and/or “top” or “bottom” surgeries. Only one person in this set self-identified as “genderqueer” without taking those measures.

INCOME RANGE PER MONTH

\$0-\$500	2
\$501-\$1,000	8
\$1,001-\$2,000	7
\$2,001-\$3,000	4
\$3,001-\$5,000	4
\$5,000+	1
Decline to state:	5

SUPPORT FROM SOCIAL SERVICES

SSI:	5
Food stamps:	3
Other:	3
None:	14
Decline to state:	6

OTHER SOURCES OF INCOME

Family:	1
“Straight” job:	11
Odd jobs:	3
No other source:	10
Decline to state:	6

SUPPORTING:

Self Only:	18
Self + Partner:	6
Self + Child(ren):	4
Self + Other:	2
Decline to state:	1

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

FIRST ITERATION

After verbal consent is read and pseudonym is chosen.

1. Do you consider yourself a “sex worker” or would you use a different word to describe what you do?
2. Tell me about places where you have worked or where you are currently working. Do you work by yourself or with others?
3. Who has been really influential in your life as a sex worker?
4. Tell me about your typical day when you’re working as a sex worker and who you come in contact with throughout your day.
5. Could you tell me about anyone who helps you arrange your dates or helps you with security or money management?
6. Who are the people that you feel are emotionally closest to you?
7. If you were in trouble or needed help, who would you go to?
8. Do you have a relationship with the family that raised you when you were a child?
9. Do you have a circle of people that you consider family today? Can you tell me about people in your family that are not related to you by blood? Do you refer to them with anything like a nickname or other term?
10. Do you have any connections to people specifically because they have the same drug or alcohol habits as you do?
11. When do you think you are most likely to call X “Y”? When you are with them, or when you are talking to others about them?
12. I’ve noticed that you’ve used terms such as _____ and _____. Can you tell me where you learned to use those words? Who taught you?
13. Tell me about some of the names that you have used in the past and explain why you used different names or who helped you choose those names.
14. What do you think are the differences working as a (male) versus a (female) or (trans) worker?

15. Tell me about your experiences, if any, with the police and sex work.

SECOND ITERATION

After verbal consent is read and pseudonym is chosen.

1. Tell me about your life growing up.
2. Do you have a relationship with the family that raised you when you were a child?
3. Do you have a circle of people that you consider family today? Can you tell me about people in your family that are not related to you by blood? Do you refer to them with anything like a nickname or other term?
4. Who are the people that you feel are emotionally closest to you?
5. If you were in trouble or needed help, who would you go to?
6. What kind of sex work do you do? When was the last time you worked?
7. How long have you been a sex worker? How did you get involved in sex work?
8. Do you work by yourself or with others?
9. What strategies do you use to connect to people in the sex work community?
10. Do you consider yourself a “sex worker” or would you use a different word to describe what you do?
11. Tell me about your typical day when you’re working as a sex worker and who you come in contact with throughout your day.
12. Tell me about some of the names that you have used in the past and explain why you used different names or who helped you choose those names.
13. Could you tell me about anyone who helps you arrange your dates or helps you with security or money management?
14. Do you have any connections to people specifically because they have the same drug or alcohol habits as you do?

15. When do you think you are most likely to call X “Y” ? When you are with them, or when you are talking to others about them?
16. I’ve noticed that you’ve used terms such as _____ and _____. Can you tell me where you learned to use those words? Who taught you?
17. What do you think are the differences working as a (male) versus a (female) versus a (trans) worker?
18. Overall, what is positive and negative about sex work for you?
19. Tell me about your experiences, if any, with the police.
20. What are the effects on you of sex work being illegal?

THIRD ITERATION

After verbal consent is read and pseudonym is chosen.

1. Tell me about your life growing up.
2. Do you have a circle of people that you consider family today? Can you tell me about people in your family that are not related to you by blood? Do you refer to them with anything like a nickname or other term?
3. Who are the people that you feel are emotionally closest to you?
4. If you were in trouble or needed help, who would you go to?
5. What kind of sex work do you do? When was the last time you worked? Where do you work?
6. Do you work by yourself or with others?
7. What strategies do you use to connect to people in the sex work community?
8. Do you consider yourself a “sex worker” or would you use a different word to describe what you do?
9. Tell me about some of the names that you have used in the past and explain why you used different names or who helped you choose those names.
10. Could you tell me about anyone who helps you arrange your dates or helps you with security or money management?

11. Do you have any connections to people specifically because they have the same drug or alcohol habits as you do?
12. Do you think your gender (age) (race) affects your work? If so, how?
13. Overall, what is positive and negative about sex work for you?
14. Tell me about your experiences, if any, with the police.
15. What are the effects on you of sex work being illegal?
16. Do you ever feel isolated because of sex work? If so, please tell me about it.
17. Do you have fear or anxiety about people finding out about sex work? If so, please tell me about it.
18. How do you feel connected to people in your life?

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