PERFORMING AGENCY: A PHOTOVOICE PROJECT WITH WOMEN WHO ENGAGE IN SEX WORK

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A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
of the University of Lethbridge
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Faculty of Health Sciences
University of Lethbridge
LETHBRIDGE, ALBERTA, CANADA

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Date of Defence: March 6, 2019

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Territory Acknowledgement

I acknowledge that this research was conducted in the Traditional Territory of the *Siksikaitsitapi* or Blackfoot peoples. The region is also located within Treaty 7 lands and the Métis Homeland.

Dedication

To the women who shared their stories and their art so that others might understand their experiences.

Abstract

Seven women engaged in various types of sex work shared their stories and their art using photovoice to address the question: What are your experiences doing sex work in Lethbridge, Alberta? Participants created specific sex work identities, which provided emotional protection and allowed them to avoid conflict with their other roles such as partner or mother. Participants controlled the level of intimacy they permitted with their clients by distancing themselves through substance use and emotional disengagement, or allowing a certain level of intimacy through deep acting. Participants also enacted agency daily within structural barriers such as stigma, violence, and the criminal justice and social service systems; facilitated or hindered in their actions by these social structures and their individual intersections of race, class, age, ability, and social capital. Recommendations for changes to service provision in Lethbridge, as well as limitations of this research and directions for future research are discussed.

Acknowledgments

This thesis would never have come to be without the combined efforts of many people. Most importantly, I am honoured to have been trusted with the stories of the seven women who shared their voices and their art. I greatly appreciate the thoughtful and creative photos they made, as well as their insight and candour.

I am grateful to have had the guidance and insight of a committee of powerful and accomplished professors who gave of their time and energy to guide this project and help me succeed, even when I did not think I would. I am thankful for my supervisor, Dr. Jean Harrowing, and my committee members Dr. Judith Kulig and Dr. Claudia Malacrida for their patience in a project that took far longer than originally anticipated, and for their critiques and constructive criticism of multiple drafts.

I would like to thank the many wonderful friends and family members who have supported me, listened to me, and offered their wisdom and their experience; while they may not have managed to salvage my sanity, they are the reason I survived the journey.

Finally, I would like to thank the team of incredible super-husband, and loving and flexible grandmas and aunties who made possible the logistics of doing the research, writing the thesis, and working while parenting. And to the three most important people in my life, Perry, Noa, and Julian—thank you for your patience, your love, and your support. I could never have done this without you. You are everything to me.

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Bad date	Sex work transaction gone wrong, including assault and refusal to pay
Bad date sheet	Leaflet giving a description of a client who assaulted or defrauded a sex worker so that person can be avoided
Bawdy-house	Legal term for a place where sex work happens indoors
Bondage and Discipline, Sadism and Masochism	Sexual activity involving such practices as the use of physical and emotional restraints, the granting and relinquishing of control, and the infliction of pain
Cis-gendered	Those whose gender expression matches their birth sex
Date	Can refer to a sex work client or a sex work transaction
In-calls	Where the client comes to the sex worker's home or hotel
Land-use conflict	Where businesses or residents raise complaints about sex work in the area
Out-calls	Where the sex worker goes to the client's home or hotel
Spot	A safety tactic where someone notes a license plate and vehicle description for a sex worker, in case of a bad date
Stroll	Area where outdoor sex work happens, often a specific street
Survival sex work	Exchange of sex for food, shelter or other basic necessities
Transactional sex work	Exchange of sex for goods
Transgendered	Those whose gender expression does not match their birth sex

Chapter One: Introduction

Sex work largely happens out of sight, and much of what the general public understands about sex work is inaccurate and informed mainly by heavily biased media reporting that focuses on the trauma and violence experienced by some sex workers as inherently representative of sex work in general (Strega et al., 2014). The sex worker in these stories is depicted as "not quite a victim, not quite an agent, not quite a woman, and often, not quite a person" (Janzen, Strega, Brown, Morgan, & Carrière, 2013, p. 143). Characterization of sex workers as defiled others supports a separation of 'us' from 'them' that reinforces moral superiority and reassures people that they could never succumb to such a fate, because they are different. In addition to these attitudes toward sex workers being disturbing, they are also based on inaccurate assumptions and misinformation (Lowman & Louie, 2012). The sex work industry is varied and diverse, as are the individuals who do the work, and their experiences within it.

Background

Sex Work in Canada

Individuals who engage in sex work in Canada comprise a diverse group who vary in age, gender expression, sexual orientation, racial and ethnic background, income, education level, and ability (Benoit & Shumka, 2015; Jones, 2015). Workspaces are similarly diverse. Street-level solicitation is the most visible and also portrayed most often in film and in the media, but Canadian studies suggest that outdoor work comprises only 20% of all sex work in Canada (Lowman, 2005). The greater part of the industry occurs indoors (e.g., massage and body rub parlours, escort agencies, bars, clubs, bathhouses and hotels) and thus is less noticeable. Workers may be self-employed and

work in any of these sites, from home (providing in-calls where the client comes to the worker's home, or out-calls where the worker goes to the client's home or hotel), or online in the case of webcam work. The services these workers offer range from "traditional" to fetish, Bondage and Discipline, Sadism and Masochism, and role-play, and cross over to include companionship, listening, counselling, and healing therapies (Benoit & Shumka, 2015).

Individuals engage in sex work because of chronic or temporary financial need, flexible working hours that can accommodate children and family needs or other work, for the autonomy of self-employment, the freedom to choose when and how often to work (Benoit, Ouellet, Jansson, Magnus, & Smith, 2017; Jeffrey & MacDonald, 2006; Sanders, 2005), and in some cases because such work provides "an opportunity to explore their sexuality, to validate their desirability, and to be part of something that defies social-sexual norms and values" (Benoit & Shumka, 2015, p. 3).

The vast diversity in the individuals who do sex work, the places they work, and the services they provide means that the discussion of sex work in Canada is also necessarily broad and generalized, and is not an accurate portrayal of individual experiences. Nevertheless, it can be useful to examine some common experiences that sex workers report. Contextualizing experiences and critically examining the telling of sex worker narratives can allow for a more nuanced understanding of the different realities of individuals who engage in sex work in Canada. In this thesis I will seek to be critical and also transparent in my presentation of the literature and interpretation of my participants' stories so that my own biases are clear and readers are able to come to their own understanding.

The literature on the experiences of sex workers in Canada covers violence, isolation, and discrimination. Stigma is also common, which Goffman (1963) explains as the experience of perceiving rejection (regardless of intent), stemming from finding oneself outside of what is considered normal social behaviour or traits. Mill (2003) takes the responsibility of falling outside of the norm away from the individual and places it on society, by describing stigma as the "disgrace and shunning directed toward those individuals who are outcast by society" (p.7). These negative experiences described in the sex work literature are increased for those who face multiple layers of stigma because they also fall outside of gender, racial, or class norms. Thus individual experiences of violence, isolation and stigma by sex workers may vary based on these intersections.

The same can be said about the individual impact of various social structures on sex worker experiences. Social structures are institutions or social constructs such as government or the law that produce and reproduce power dynamics in their interactions with individuals and society (Choby & Clark, 2014). Individuals who do sex work interact with such structures, and are affected by them in varying ways. Much of the literature focuses on structures as having negative effects on sex workers lives, but they can also have positive effects, such as when the isolation that stems from dangerous laws also offers privacy to operate a business without being noticed.

Canadian Legal Context

Sex work in Canada is illegal, which is an important context because it can naturalize stigma and violence against sex workers as criminals (Bruckert & Hannem, 2013). The current legislative framework falls under a *Radical Feminist Model* of laws (Lowman & Louie, 2012), which views sex work as necessarily male violence toward female victims. The goal of this model is eradication of the sex trade by eliminating

demand, thus removing the need for supply. This means that enforcement is targeted toward purchasers of sex, and sex workers themselves are exempt from prosecution. Sections of the Criminal Code of Canada (CCC) deal specifically with bawdy houses (a place where sex work happens indoors), communication for the purposes of sex work, living off the avails of sex work, and advertisement and procurement, making all of these illegal (Government of Canada Department of Justice, 1985). Ironically, though the legislative model purports to help sex workers as victims of male oppression, each section of the criminal code serves to endanger sex workers by making illegal many of the strategies they may employ to keep themselves safe, such as working indoors, screening clients, hiring safety staff, and advertising online (Davies, 2015). Chapter Two will go into further depth about the evolution of the current laws and how each section specifically affects sex worker health and safety.

This research focuses on *women who engage in sex work*, which I will hereafter refer to as *Women*. I chose this term as opposed to the highly stigmatizing *prostitute*, or simply *female sex worker*, which emphasizes the individual's work as representative of the person. This people-first terminology choice is deliberate as the research focuses on women who are greater than this one activity they engage in. Sex work in this research refers to consensual adult employment, as opposed to trafficking, coercion, sex slavery, or child prostitution, though it does include instances where consensual sex work is influenced or abused. I have intentionally not defined sex work in this paper because there is not an agreed upon definition that suits the diversity of individuals who engage in sex work, nor is one offered in Canadian law. For the purposes of this research, participants self-identify as Women, and for the broader discussion I include any sort of sexual service offered in consensual exchange for money, goods, material or other

benefit, where both parties agree to the terms. This includes but is not limited to street sex work, escorting, massage and body rub parlour work, webcam or phone chat work, exotic dancing, stripping, transactional (exchange of sex for goods), and survival sex work (exchange of sex for shelter or other basic necessities).

Background to the Research

My background as a registered nurse working with Women in Vancouver, British Columbia has given me insight into some of the larger issues, including safety, stigma, and privacy, that have been identified by both Women and agencies there and in the literature. I also witnessed the difference in relationships and outcomes between the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) detachments in neighbouring municipalities. The VPD tends to take a more supportive, hands-off approach, while the RCMP in neighboring municipalities conduct raids, pose as clients, and actively move Women from certain areas. Women in those municipalities patrolled by the RCMP were far less likely to access police services than those working in Vancouver. I saw how the stroll (area where outdoor sex work happens, often a specific street) could be dangerous, but also how it functions as a safety mechanism for those working outdoors, allowing them to spot (a safety tactic where someone notes a license plate and vehicle description for a Woman, in case of a bad date) for and connect with each other. I heard many stories about how drop-in centers, outreach services to indoor and outdoor locations, sex-work supportive housing, bad-date reporting systems, and peer-led, non-exit based programs were essential to supporting Women.

When I left Vancouver I wondered what it was like for those individuals who engaged in sex work in smaller communities such as the one in which I now live. The context is very different from what I saw in Vancouver, and when I examined the

literature, I found that nearly all the research on sex work comes from cities with large populations such as Vancouver, Montreal, Toronto and even Calgary. This is significant as there are structures in place in these large urban centers that strongly impact the experiences of those that work there (Orchard, Farr, Macphail, Wender, & Young, 2012), and their absence in smaller urban and rural areas begs the question of the transferability of research findings to other areas.

Relevant to sex work, small urban and rural areas typically cannot offer the same level of harm reduction or outreach services available in larger centres. Outreach and harm reduction programs that distribute condoms, lubrication, drug equipment, bad date sheets (leaflet giving a description of a client who assaulted or defrauded an individual doing sex work so that the person can be avoided), hand-warmers, and food have been shown to positively impact Women's experiences. Also, outreach programs that provide nursing and harm reduction services to Women while they are working increase the accessibility of these services and enhance health and wellness. Sex work-specific programs, particularly if they are peer-led, can offer a safe, non-judgmental space for enhancing health and wellness (Bungay et al., 2013; Deering et al., 2011; Janssen, Gibson, Bowen, Spittal, & Petersen, 2009; Rabinovitch, 2003). It is possible that the absence of such programs could significantly impact Women's experiences (Orchard et al., 2012).

In addition, larger cities generally have at least grudgingly accepted strolls. While the concentration of sex work in these areas can present dangers to Women, such as increasing their visibility to police (Shannon, Rusch, et al., 2008), there can also be increased safety in working with others (Krüsi et al., 2012; Lewis, Maticka-Tyndale,

Shaver, & Schramm, 2005). Fewer Women in rural settings or smaller towns may mean less of an established stroll, increasing vulnerability, as individuals often work alone.

Purpose of the Research Project

It is clear that Women do not comprise a homogenous group who come from similar places or who live similar lives. However, there are common issues faced by many Women. While the literature in this area is growing, there is still much work to be done to understand the array of experiences and complex factors that influence them. One area that has not been studied sufficiently is the lives of individuals who engage in sex work in areas with a smaller population. Most of the literature with a few exceptions comes from large centres in Canada, leaving the voices and experiences of those who work in smaller areas muted.

The purpose of this research project was to gain knowledge about the experiences of several women who engage in sex work in Lethbridge to broaden the larger body of literature to include voices from a different context. A further purpose, and one that was more personal for me, was to meaningfully engage those who work in Lethbridge, so that their input could be shared with local service providers and perhaps there could ensue changes that might benefit them.

This is a critical, feminist research project. I use feminist theory to guide the research, prioritizing the voices and positions of the participants. I endeavour to remain critical of the systems and oppressions that are imposed on them, and recognize their strengths and successes as they navigate within them.

Research Question

In this research study I address the question: What are the experiences of several women who engage in sex work in Lethbridge? The research question is intentionally broad as little is known about sex work in areas with smaller populations. The open-ended nature of the research question allows for the participants to direct the research focus and identify what is important for potential audiences to know.

Significance of the Research Project

This is a small qualitative research project and the intent is not to suggest generalizations of Women's experiences in small urban and rural areas, nor can it describe the experiences of all Women in Lethbridge. This research contributes to the larger body of research on sex work in Canada and highlights what these participants perceive as important. This will serve as a first step in broadening our understanding of sex work experiences to include those from individuals in smaller cities. At a local level, I will use information from this research to engage service providers and inform them about recommendations for potential change from several local Women.

Overview of the Thesis

Chapter Two is a review of the major literature on Canadian Women's experiences. I have focused on sex work in Canada because the legal system, which will also be discussed, plays a large role in contextualizing these experiences. I discuss major themes in the literature, such as the structures that act to constrain the lives of Women, including violence, stigma, laws and policing practices. Conversely, I highlight literature examining how Women enact agency in mitigating some of the risks they face, and the argument that Women are entitled to the same rights and freedoms as any other Canadian worker.

Chapter Three outlines the research methods utilized in this study and offers a description of the research process. I employed a descriptive exploratory methodology because little is known about the experiences of Women in cities with smaller populations. This methodology supports photovoice—a data collection method that involves giving participants cameras to take photos of what they feel describes their experiences. I then invited them to tell me about their photos, allowing participants to dictate the research direction. Photovoice aligns well with feminist standpoint theory—a way of knowing that favours the standpoint of women, or in a larger sense, groups traditionally marginalized (Hartsock, 2004). It is this larger view that I take, prioritizing Women as those most uniquely positioned to understand, express, and communicate their own experiences as well as their place in relation to the world around them. Photovoice also supports feminist intersectionality—the acknowledgment of how unique identity points such as gender, sexuality, race, or class interact to shape individual experience, as a lens to understand individual differences. In this chapter, I also explain the thematic analysis used to organize and analyze the data, and how I ensured trustworthiness and rigour in the research process. I also detail plans for Knowledge Translation and Exchange (KTE) after the research is finished, as well as what I have done to date.

Chapter Four addresses the research findings. I use themes derived from participant interviews to describe experiences, and deeper analysis to explore ways participants negotiate their roles in individual interactions and in society. This exploration will offer new insights into identity construction and management, and how Women help to shape their reality. I will also discuss how Women actively dictate the parameters of their interactions with clients in order to control the amount of intimacy they allow, using various strategies to maintain their boundaries.. The findings include a shift in perspective

about how Women exercise agency within the structural barriers that often serve to constrain them, acknowledging the complexity of terms like structure and agency in understanding Women's experiences.

Chapter Five discusses the research findings in relation to the larger body of literature. I situate participants' stories within the literature and explore how Women actively and thoughtfully negotiate their own roles in individual interactions, and situate themselves within society. Women enact agency within the social structures that are in play around them, both because and in spite of the varying intersecting identities that are part of their realities. Agency enactment is one part of how Women create different identities and manage them specific to time and place. I discuss how identity management allows Women to then set and negotiate their own boundaries. This process involves navigating the continuum between the extreme isolation that sex work can manifest and the connections that are also inherent in their work and the relationships with those around them. The chapter finishes with recommendations from participants for service and policy changes, as well as an acknowledgment of the limitations of this work and the directions for future research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In December 2013, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that laws governing the sex trade in Canada represent an unconstitutional risk to the rights of individuals who engage in sex work to protect themselves from harm ("*Canada (Attorney General) v. Bedford*," 2013). Because many of the safety strategies that sex workers used were illegal, the laws made their lives more dangerous. This will be discussed in more detail further in the chapter. The laws were then changed under the Conservative government of the time, with the idea of enshrining further protections for those workers; however many prominent researchers argue that the new laws do little to ameliorate the risks inherent in the old laws (Davies, 2015; Landsberg et al., 2017). The legalities of the trade permeate every aspect of sex work, and negatively contextualize Women's day-to-day experiences. Sex worker rights groups have long called for change, both to protect Women from risk and stigma, and to grant them the same rights as other Canadian workers. The consensus in academia echoes this need for a paradigm shift (Comte, 2014; Fritsch, Heynen, Ross, & van der Meulen, 2016; Landsberg et al., 2017), with nearly the entire body of literature on sex work in Canada arguing for some level of decriminalization, further suggesting that reflection on this subject is overdue.

It is difficult to discuss such a broad topic as Women in Canada without generalizing, but I attempt to convey some common circumstances and experiences while acknowledging the diverse set of realities that make up individual experiences. Chapters Four and Five explore specific experiences of the women who participated in this research.

Literature on the Experiences of Women in Canada

My research aims to add to the literature on the experiences of Women in Canada by exploring the experiences of several Women in Lethbridge. I review the literature with a general focus on concepts used to describe the experiences of those doing consensual adult sex work, and provide a sufficient cross-section to saturate the broader themes that characterize the larger body of literature. The legal status of sex work heavily contextualizes Women's experiences, so I have limited my review to research with a Canadian focus. Further, I draw on research done in the last 15 years, because while an analysis of the history of sex work in Canada or past views on the experience would undoubtedly illuminate how the current situation has come to be, it would not accurately describe the experiences of those who currently engage in the trade, which are shaped by current laws and contemporary norms and values specific to this place, and which contextualize my research. This chapter begins with an in-depth look at sex work in Canada, followed by an overview of the current legal status of sex work, a comparison of approaches to regulating sex work taken in other jurisdictions, and concludes with a critical review of literature pertaining to the experiences of Women in Canada.

In addition to the experiences of Women in Canada, I have also included a section at the end of the literature review about arts-based research. Because this project utilizes photovoice, I wanted to explore the strengths and possibilities of non-traditional research such as this. The literature for this section was not limited to Canada; instead I searched for articles discussing arts-based research and present a general overview.

Overview of the Legal Context

I will briefly compare four basic models of global sex work laws to better explain Canada's current model and the recent changes that occurred. Lowman and Louie (2012)

describe these four models; two that are prohibitive—the *Conservative* and *Radical-Feminist Models*, and two that are legal—the *Legalized* and *Decriminalized Models*. The majority of jurisdictions in the United States use the *Conservative Model*, criminalizing both buyers and sellers of sexual services. Sweden, and as of December 2014, Canada, use the *Radical-Feminist Model* (also called *end-demand* or *Swedish model*), which criminalizes buyers and any third parties that profit from the sale of sexual services, but not the worker themself. Several counties in Nevada as well as the Netherlands and Germany have *Legalized* sex work. This means there are specific legislation, licensing, policing and criminal guidelines in place to govern the sale of sexual services. New Zealand is currently the only country, along with one state in Australia, which have implemented the fourth model, *Decriminalization*. In this model the sex trade is removed completely from the criminal code, and the industry is then regulated by municipal labour codes, as with any other workplace.

There are marked differences in the philosophical underpinnings of these models, which account for the differences in approach. Proponents of the *Conservative Model* see the sex trade as inherently dangerous and necessarily connected with other criminal activity, and those who engage in sex work as threats to the moral well being, health, and privacy of the rest of society (Bruckert & Hannem, 2013). The goal in this model is to eradicate the sex trade. Those who support the *Radical-Feminist Model* see the sex trade as evidence of male domination and oppression over women, and all those engaging in sex work as helpless victims of this power inequality (Nixon, Tutty, Downe, Gorkoff, & Ursel, 2002; van der Meulen, 2012; van der Meulen & Durisin, 2008). It is unclear where males or those with other gender expressions who engage in sex work fit in this model; they seem to be disregarded entirely. The goal is to cut off demand in order to eradicate

the sex trade, thus saving women from male dominance. Supporters of the *Legalization Model* see the sex trade as harmful but inevitable, and therefore look to legislation to minimize the unavoidable dangers (van der Meulen & Durisin, 2008). The goal is not the eradication of the trade, but minimization of its associated risks to society, and to those involved in sex work. Those who support the *Decriminalization Model* view the sex trade as a valid industry, and those who engage in sex work as legitimate labourers who deserve the same rights and responsibilities as any other workers (van der Meulen, 2011, 2012; van der Meulen & Durisin, 2008). The goal in this model is for a safe and integrated sex trade. It should be noted that the majority of the authors reviewed appeared to support at least some level of decriminalization or legalization in Canada (Comte, 2014; Fritsch et al., 2016).

As of December 2014, sex work was made illegal for the first time in Canadian history. Specifically, sections 210 and 211 of the CCC prohibits owning, operating, entering, transporting, or directing someone to a bawdy-house (legal term for a place where sex work happens indoors), effectively making indoor work (the safest place to do sex work) illegal (Corriveau & Greco, 2014; Shannon, Kerr, et al., 2008). Section 213 prohibits attempting to stop or actually stopping traffic for the purposes of prostitution at any place in public view, as well as communication for those same purposes near any place children might conceivably be or view (specifically including inside a car). This necessitates rushed transactions for outdoor workers, effectively curtailing negotiation and screening of clients (Landsberg et al., 2017; Lowman, 2005). Section 286 prohibits procurement and living off the avails of prostitution, effectively making supporting oneself or others from sex work earnings, illegal (van der Meulen, 2010a). Recent changes now exclude dependents, family members, and roommates, who were previously

vulnerable under this section, but still includes employees or management—important safety personnel for many workers (van der Meulen, 2010a). This section also now prohibits advertising sexual services, making online and print advertising illegal, even though they are safer alternatives to outdoor solicitation (Lazarus, Chettiar, Deering, Nabess, & Shannon, 2011; Lewis et al., 2005; Lowman, 2000; O'Doherty, 2011b; Seshia, 2010; Shannon et al., 2009). Most notably, and what places these laws under the *Radical-Feminist Model* as opposed to a *Conservative* one, is that this section also excludes from prosecution anyone who violates the above laws by offering their own sexual services. By excluding those who do sex work from prosecution and focusing on clients, the laws aim to cut off demand for sex work, thus freeing women from being exploited by the industry ((Government of Canada Department of Justice, 1985). See Appendix A for full sections 210, 211, 213 and 286 of the CCC). I will discuss below, in relation to the major topics in the literature, exactly how each of these sections affects Women in practice. One of the most detrimental effects of the laws is the violence toward Women that they facilitate.

Violence as a Structural Barrier to Health and Wellbeing

Social structures represent the power relations that are produced and reproduced in the relationships between society and institutions (Choby & Clark, 2014). For example, applying the label "crime" to an act is a social decision made by police officers, judges, lawmakers, media, and society. That social decision may vary based on time and place as laws change or are enforced differently; for example, homosexuality was once labelled a crime but is no longer. The relationships between those involved both result from and perpetuate power inequalities such as class, race, and gender (Choby & Clark, 2014).

Violence can be understood as "part of a broad-scale system of domination" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1241) that disproportionally affects women, transgendered

individuals, Indigenous peoples, and those whose other identity categories similarly place them in a 'lower' class (Deering et al., 2014). Shannon, Kerr, et al. (2008) discussed their participants' reports of violence, fear of violence, and the feeling that the violence against them was not acknowledged or dealt with by police. The vulnerability they experienced led to feelings of diminished power to insist on condom use for their own protection. This is an example of how violence (or even the fear of violence) allowed by the actions or inaction of those in positions of power can act as a structural barrier to wellbeing by preventing Women from protecting themselves.

Media accounts of serial killings and the hundreds of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls across Canada, many of whom are assumed to be engaged in sex work (Janzen et al., 2013; Lowman, 2000; National Inquiry Into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2017; Strega et al., 2014), have perhaps understandably dominated recent public conversation. However less sensational occurrences like assault from pimps, managers, intimate partners, clients, police, the general public, or each other occur far too often (Argento et al., 2014; Deering et al., 2014; Nixon et al., 2002; Seshia, 2010), and are less prominent in debates concerning the regulation of sex work.

In a systematic review, Deering et al. (2014) found that "[i]n Canada, previous police violence (physical or sexual), confiscation of drug paraphernalia by police, and enforced police displacement away from main areas were independently associated with experiencing violence by clients and any physical violence" (p.48). Those who solicit outdoors are more likely to experience these police scenarios due to their higher visibility and therefore more regular contact with police. They are also more likely to experience client violence (Argento et al., 2014; O'Doherty, 2011b). Other factors associated with

increased risk of violence for Women include homelessness, client condom refusal, and inaccessibility of drug treatment (Deering et al., 2014; Shannon et al., 2009). These highlight the role of economic barriers in predisposing Women to violence, as workers who are homeless or struggle with addiction may be forced to accept a client or perform a service such as sex without a condom, that they otherwise might refuse. Other studies have found that transgender workers, especially Indigenous ones, experience greater violence than do other sex workers, due to "intersecting layers of colonialism, transphobia and homophobia" (Lyons, Krüsi, Pierre, Small, & Shannon, 2017, p. 883).

Nixon et al. (2002) conducted qualitative individual and focus group interviews with 47 cis-gendered and trans-gendered Women in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. While the research focused on entry into the sex trade and access to services, violence emerged as a prominent theme. Participants overwhelmingly reported verbal and physical abuse from the general public. Half of the sample reported abuse from pimps or intimate partners, and more than half from dates (sex work clients). Some 20% reported abuse or propositioning from police, 2% reported abuse from service workers, and 35% reported being perpetrators of violence toward other Women, dates, intimate partners, or service providers. The participants' description of the violence was graphic and disturbing, but is unfortunately not exceptional. Nearly every article I reviewed mentioned this type of systemic violence toward and within the sex trade. There were, however, factors that may have affected the findings in Nixon and colleagues' study. For example, recruitment was done through services for addiction and sex work, so the sample was likely more representative of outdoor Women's experiences (Deering et al., 2011; Shannon, Rusch, et al., 2008) despite the fact that no mention of the type or location of the work was made. It is well established that outdoor sex work is more

strongly associated with violence than indoor sex work (Lazarus et al., 2011; Lewis et al., 2005; Lowman, 2000; O'Doherty, 2011b; Seshia, 2010; Shannon et al., 2009). Interestingly, Nixon and colleagues' study found no differences in the violence reported by Indigenous versus non-Indigenous participants, which contradicts most reported findings (Bingham, Leo, Zhang, Montaner, & Shannon, 2014; Deering et al., 2014; Duff et al., 2014; Janzen et al., 2013; Mehrabadi et al., 2008). This contradiction could possibly be due to the use by Nixon et al. of convenience sampling, which is common in qualitative work, but can result in a less representative group (Bryman, Bell, & Teevan, 2012).

A major critique of the literature pertaining to violence is the underlying gendered assumption of male violence toward Women (Lewis et al., 2005; Lowman, 2000; van der Meulen, 2010b). In fact, studies that include all genders find that trans-gendered workers often face the most frequent and severe violence (Deering et al., 2014; Lewis et al., 2005; Seshia, 2010; Shaver, Lewis, & Maticka-Tyndale, 2011), and that violence comes at the hands of Women, police, intimate partners, and the general public in addition to male clients and pimps (Argento et al., 2014; Corriveau & Greco, 2014; Deering et al., 2014; Nixon et al., 2002).

Perhaps even more important, is the portrayal of the startling violence that is experienced by outdoor workers as representative of the experiences of individuals engaged in sex work in general. While it is impossible to ascertain actual numbers, the generally accepted estimate is that those who solicit outdoors comprise only 20% of the population of those who do sex work in Canada (Lowman, 2005); meanwhile it has been well established that this smaller population suffers most of the violence (Lazarus et al., 2011; Lewis et al., 2005; O'Doherty, 2011b; Seshia, 2010; Shannon et al., 2009). Many

authors who focused on indoor sex work found that participants faced little violence. This negates the common assumption that violence is inherent to sex work, and supports assertions that violence stems instead from stigma as outdoor workers are more visible and therefore more targeted by police surveillance and crackdowns (Krüsi, Kerr, Taylor, Rhodes, & Shannon, 2016). Violence occurs less frequently in indoor settings where safety features such as bodyguards and security cameras can more easily be adopted (Morrison & Whitehead, 2007; O'Doherty, 2011b). Few researchers discussing violence as a main theme specified location (indoor versus outdoor) in the title or abstract, which can be misleading when extreme violence experienced by outdoor workers is portrayed as if it were a common experience within the entire industry. Such inaccuracy perpetuates the myth of sex work being an inherently dangerous activity (Bruckert & Hannem, 2013; O'Doherty, 2011b; Seshia, 2010), an argument used to support restrictive legislation in the *Conservative* and *Radical-Feminist Models*.

Systemic Barriers to Health and Wellbeing

Many authors described systemic and social factors such as laws and policing practices, and stigma, that that act as barriers to the health and wellbeing of Women.

Laws as a systemic barrier. Prior to 2013, researchers indicated that section 113 of the CCC limited the extent to which individuals engaged in sex work could communicate in public, thus forcing outdoor workers to make hasty decisions and get into vehicles without first assessing the client or negotiating terms (Lewis et al., 2005; Shannon, Kerr, et al., 2008). Often, massage parlour workers and those who solicit in bars or bathhouses also delayed assessment and negotiation until they were alone in a room in order to avoid this criminal charge (O'Doherty, 2011a; van der Meulen & Durisin, 2008). At this time, sections 110 and 111 pertaining to bawdy-houses made indoor work, the

safest place to do sex work, illegal. This restriction on indoor work forced escorts to do out-calls (date at a client's house or hotel) rather than in-calls (date at their own home or hotel), which could be considered a bawdy-house if sex work frequently happens there (Corriveau & Greco, 2014). Workers were also forced to avoid hotels with which they were familiar for the same reasons, meaning that they were made to continually shift between potentially unfamiliar environments rather than familiar ones where a safety system (like checking-in with the front desk or security) might be utilized (Corriveau & Greco, 2014; Morrison & Whitehead, 2005, 2007). This bawdy-house legislation also meant that massage parlours or other indoor establishments often did not make available safer sex supplies like condoms, lubrication, or gloves, and could be hesitant to allow health and social service outreach workers in, as the presence of such health and safety equipment and personnel could be used as evidence that the establishment was a bawdy-house. Section 112 regarding living off the avails of prostitution was harmful to individuals engaged in sex work in that it endangered their friends and family and alienated them from social supports (O'Doherty, 2011a; van der Meulen & Durisin, 2008). Section 112 also prohibits the use of security personnel such as drivers, doormen, or managers, who can be charged with living off the avails of prostitution (O'Doherty, 2011a; van der Meulen & Durisin, 2008).

In December 2013, in response to a challenge brought forth by Women and advocates Terri Jean Bedford, Amy Lebovitch, and Valerie Scott, Canadian federal laws regarding sex work were found by the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) to represent an unconstitutional violation of workers' right to security of person under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms ("Canada (Attorney General) v. Bedford," 2013). Specifically, the SCC upheld an earlier Ontario Court of Appeal ruling that Section 110

regarding bawdy-houses, Section 212(1)(j) regarding living off the avails of prostitution, and Section 113(1)(c) regarding communication for the purposes of prostitution prohibited workers' ability to legally take steps to protect themselves (i.e., working indoors, hiring drivers and security personnel, screening clients, and negotiating acceptable terms of service).

The government was given one year to amend the laws that actively prevented those engaged in sex work from taking steps to protect themselves. Bill C-36, The Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act, was officially passed in December 2014. The title of the Act offers some insight into the goals that drive it and the philosophy that informs it. The aim is first and foremost to protect communities—one might assume from the ills that are thought to surround sex work. The second half of the title underscores the *Radical Feminist* position that Women are necessarily being exploited in their work. In their research into sex work legislation, Bruckert and Hannem (2013) drew on Foucault's views on discourse, power, and knowledge to show how those in power create laws that reinforce their own moral views and silence all others. They use examples of judges citing stigmatized ideas based on "common knowledge" of sex work as inherently dangerous to Women as well as the communities in which they work, despite the evidence-based counter narratives that contradict those ideas. These moral-based stigmas reiterated by those in positions of power become "encapsulated in judicial-legal discourse, reified as truth, and ultimately embedded in case law—power /knowledge in the making" (Bruckert & Hannem, p. 48)

Unfortunately, the laws did not change much at all under the new Act, and almost all of the safety concerns raised above still apply (Campbell, 2015; Davies, 2015). The lone exception is the regulation that family and friends are now excluded from

prosecution under Section 112—living off the avails of prostitution. This exclusion may help some of the alienation from social support that workers encountered, as they no longer have to fear that their partner or roommate will be charged under this section of the CCC. The law still prohibits workers from hiring security personnel such as drivers or bodyguards for safety, however. In addition, the exclusion of individuals engaged in sex work themselves means that they will no longer be prosecuted under sex work laws. This exclusion is meant as protection for Women who are seen as victims of male violence. However, rather than eliminating sex work or protecting sex workers, criminalizing its purchase simply forces the trade further underground and into more dangerous places (Comte, 2014), and necessitates rushed transactions that make screening and negotiation difficult (Landsberg et al., 2017). The emphasis of the new legislation moved to solely criminalizing purchasers of sex and sex traffickers. The underlying philosophy of the law changed to reflect the *Radical-Feminist* assertion that sex work is necessarily male violence against women, and Women should be protected from this dominance. The dangers that the laws posed, however, remain (Campbell, 2015; Davies, 2015).

The Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act follows the *Radical-Feminist Model* of sex work legislation. The goal then, is to target the buyers of sex, to cut off demand and eradicate the need for supply. The law does this by criminalizing the purchasers of sex, while excluding from prosecution anyone selling their own sexual services.

Other facets of the law that were found to be dangerous in the literature and unconstitutional by the Supreme Court of Canada remain largely unchanged. Section 210 still criminalizes bawdy houses, making indoor work and in-calls dangerous. Section 213 still criminalizes communication for the purposes of prostitution in public view, and now

specifies communication taking place inside vehicles, and near playgrounds, schools, and daycares, necessitating rushed negotiation and solicitation in less public and more dangerous areas. Section 286 does now exclude dependents, family members and roommates from prosecution for living off the avails, but not security personnel such as bodyguards or managers. It also now makes it illegal to place online or print ads for someone else, effectively removing a safer alternative to advertise sexual services than outdoor solicitation. While this section does exclude from prosecution anyone violating the above for their own sexual services, laws that target clients force them to seek sex in less public places to avoid prosecution, rushing transactions and driving the trade further underground where violence and exploitation can more readily happen (Landsberg et al., 2017).

In addition to being dangerous in their scope, a further peril comes from the ambiguity and confusion surrounding the laws. Individuals engaged in sex work (Corriveau & Greco, 2014; O'Doherty, 2011a) and the general public alike (Lowman & Louie, 2012; Morton, Klein, & Gorzalka, 2012) often have a poor understanding of the laws and how they apply. Consequently, these workers may take unnecessary and dangerous precautions to avoid legal prosecution. For example, choosing to do out-calls rather than in-calls in an attempt to avoid a bawdy-house charge can increase risk because workers are then in potentially unfamiliar environments over which they have limited control (Corriveau & Greco, 2014). In the case of the general public, this confusion can lead to increased stigma if people's only understanding of sex work is that it is illegal (Campbell, 2015; Lowman & Louie, 2012). These laws effectively act as barriers to safety, health and wellness by prohibiting Women from taking precautions to protect themselves, such as working in the relative safety of indoor establishments.

Policing as a systemic barrier. The laws pertaining to sex work are ambiguous, so interpretation is left to unofficial policy in individual police departments, and in some cases individual officer discretion, meaning enforcement and lenience vary with location and time (Corriveau & Greco, 2014; Larsen, 1996). However, there is research that clearly indicates that many of the policing strategies employed in the name of reducing public nuisance or resolving land-use conflicts (where businesses or residents raise complaints about sex work in the area) are harmful to Women (Benoit et al., 2016; Ferris, 2015; Krüsi et al., 2016; Lowman, 2000). Specifically, targeting sex work in public areas forces Women to work in more isolated and dangerous places (Seshia, 2010; Shannon, Kerr, et al., 2008). Not responding to Women's complaints of abuse renders police protection unavailable to Women (Benoit et al., 2016; Corriveau & Greco, 2014; Krüsi et al., 2016; Lewis et al., 2005; Seshia, 2010), and further abuse, propositioning, and harassment perpetrated by police are harmful because they result in Women losing trust in those who have been given the authority and responsibility to protect them (Corriveau & Greco, 2014; Nixon et al., 2002; Shannon, Kerr, et al., 2008). Women do not experience this treatment equally. Those who are most visible—outdoor workers, many of whom live in poverty and struggle with addiction—are particularly vulnerable to police harassment and attention (Benoit et al., 2016), as are transgender workers (Lyons, Krüsi, Pierre, et al., 2017). It is well established that Indigenous peoples, particularly Indigenous women, who participate in sex work are not afforded the same protections as other citizens (Krüsi et al., 2016; National Inquiry Into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2017). The unequal experience of negative police practices perpetuates the power inequality in the social structure of policing, serving to reinforce its biases. As more marginalized individuals are targeted, they constitute a greater part of policing time

and effort, confirming the need for greater policing of this population. The effects of these policing practices result in detriment to the health and wellbeing of Women, especially those already marginalized.

In a large mixed-method study, Shaver et al. (2011) conducted 450 qualitative interviews with individuals engaged in sex work, and 40 with key informants, including police, service providers, and sex work agency managers in Ontario and Quebec. The authors also conducted a document analysis of the relevant sections of the CCC, provincial occupational health and safety (OHS) labour codes, municipal bylaws, and organization policies. The authors found working conditions across all areas of sex work to be in violation of OHS standards, including: lack of cleanliness, expectations of unpaid work, long hours without breaks, and harassment, among others. However, their participants felt unable to address these issues because OHS is unable to exert influence in illegal work situations, and because their participants reported fear of legal retribution if they complained formally. The authors also reported fears that children might be taken away by family services, that banking or tax filings might be used as evidence of illegal income resulting in difficulty with fiscal responsibility, and that friends or family may be charged with living off the avails of sex work. This study and the findings of similar research illustrate how laws and policing strategies can act as systemic barriers to safety, health and wellness (Lewis et al., 2005; O'Doherty, 2011b; van der Meulen, 2010a; van der Meulen & Durisin, 2008).

The experiences of the workers in Shaver and colleagues' study (2011) are not unique; what is unique, however, is the breadth of the study. The researchers included sex workers of all genders, many ethnicities, across a range of ages as well as work settings. They also triangulated their data with other stakeholders and relevant documents, serving

to verify the findings of other smaller studies, and confirm the generalizability of their findings. One limitation to this breadth, however, is that it does not allow for the same depth as a more focused inquiry. Though the authors mentioned the variety of their participants' demographics, they did not discuss how this variability played out specifically within their themes. It is important to recognize that experiences vary according to individual differences, and one cannot generalize experiences of all Women in Canada. Often those who are already marginalized experience systemic barriers to their wellbeing to a greater extent than do those who are less marginalized.

Stigma as a social barrier. Stigma is the experience of rejection (which can be intended or simply perceived), which comes from being outcast by society by failing to conform to what is considered 'normal' social behaviour or traits (Goffman, 1963; Mill, 2003). Women fall outside of societal norms of monogamy (Comte, 2014). Further, those Women who also belong to other groups that fall outside of social norms face multiple layers of stigma. For example, visible minorities, transgendered people, and those struggling with poverty, addiction, or mental or physical health problems represent traditionally marginalized groups. As Women, these groups tend to be overrepresented in street-level work, which may in part be due to the multiple layers of stigma they face for the work that they do, and for these traits that fall outside of social norms (Benoit & Shumka, 2015; Global Network of Sex Work Projects, n.d.). The effects of Canada's colonial history, including the devastating residential school system, and the cultural genocide of Indigenous peoples (Truth and Reconcilitaion Commission of Canada, 2015) means Indigenous persons are also overrepresented in street-level work (Bingham et al., 2014; Ferris, 2015; Hunt & Sayers, 2015). Homosexual and transgendered individuals who also work in the sex trade face greater violence and abuse than their cis-gendered

and heterosexual peers (Global Network of Sex Work Projects, n.d.; Lewis et al., 2005). Those who are poor and possibly homeless, or driven by addiction, not only face danger because they lack a safe, stable environment, but they are also among the most marginalized because their agency is so constrained by the continual pressure to secure basic needs. Incidents of exploitation, such as accepting dates or performing services they would not otherwise agree to, or trading sex for food and shelter, are well documented (Lazarus et al., 2011). Those struggling with physical and mental health issues or disability are similarly at risk as stigma may limit other job options (Prasad, D'Abate, & Prasad, 2007) and so constrain their ability to choose their work and dictate the terms around it.

Several authors show that experiences of stigma differ among Women. Stigma is reported more by outdoor than indoor workers, trans-gendered than cis-gendered workers, male than female workers, Indigenous than non-Indigenous workers, workers with lower socioeconomic status (SES) than higher, and workers who suffer from addiction or mental health issues than those who do not (Bingham et al., 2014; Deering et al., 2011; Duff et al., 2014; Lazarus et al., 2012; Lewis et al., 2005; Spittal et al., 2003). Stigma toward these groups is perpetuated not only by society in general, but also by other Women, who cling to a hierarchy within sex work, with private escorts at the top and street-workers with a pimp at the bottom (Orchard, Farr, Macphail, Wender, & Young, 2013). This heterogeneity within Women in Canada is often overlooked in research and in the media; specifically, more visible outdoor sex work is conflated with sex work in general (Janzen et al., 2013; Lowman, 2000; Strega et al., 2014). Even more importantly, the increased stigma experienced by particular groups results in an increased risk of violence, and decreased access to healthcare and social services, thus impacting the health

and wellness of Women in general (Bungay, Halpin, Atchison, & Johnston, 2011; Phillips & Benoit, 2005; Shannon, Kerr, et al., 2008; Shannon et al., 2009; Shannon, Rusch, et al., 2008).

The media discourse surrounding sex work perpetuates stigma by echoing and shaping dominant views, which then justify the harmful laws and actions described above. Larter (2011), for example, drew specific attention to the emphasis placed by the media on Women's deviance. Strega et al. (2014) also argued that media representation is steeped in judgment of a group that fails to conform to societal norms. The authors noted the depiction of Women as vermin, victims, or individuals leading a risky lifestyle, either by choice or as the unfortunate outcome of a negative childhood or Indigenous cultural experience, which left them little choice but to turn to sex work (Bingham et al., 2014; Janzen et al., 2013; Strega et al., 2014). Lowman (2000) aptly described the stigma surrounding sex work as the "discourse of disposal" (p. 988). Stigma is both reflected in and shaped by the media, society in general, and individuals. This reproduction confirms its existence as natural, and positions stigma as a systemic barrier to health and wellbeing by justifying harmful laws, enforcement practices, violence, and discrimination toward Women (Krüsi et al., 2016; Lowman, 2000; Morrison & Whitehead, 2007) and results in decreased access to health and social support services (Jackson et al., 2009; Lazarus et al., 2012).

Much of the literature on the experiences of Women is focused on the above two themes: violence as a structural barrier to health and wellness; and laws, policing strategies, and stigma as systemic barriers to health and wellness. Violence in the sex trade occurs at an alarming rate, especially in outdoor work, and occupies much of the discussion surrounding Women's experiences. Laws and policing practices in Canada

serve as systemic barriers to health and wellbeing by actively preventing Women from taking steps to protect themselves. Stigma acts as a systemic barrier by justifying harmful laws and actions (violence and discrimination) that prevent health and wellbeing. This inequality speaks to a great power imbalance between Women and the rest of society. What is missing from this discussion, however, is an acknowledgment of agency. Agency enactment was a significant finding in this research, and will be discussed in detail in Chapters Four and Five.

Strategies for Mitigating Risk

Work location. As opposed to a barrier approach, authors who focused on agency describe workers' strategies to mitigate the risks outlined above, and how their actions and choices impact their experiences. The range of strategies employed by Women to mitigate risks to their health, safety, and security are vast and often workplace specific. One of the biggest ways to decrease risk is to work indoors (Lazarus et al., 2011; Lewis et al., 2005). Choosing to work in an escort agency, massage parlour, bathhouse, club, or even a private residence or hotel can greatly decrease the risks of violence and legal prosecution associated with outdoor work. Although indoor establishments are illegal under section 210 of the CCC, they are also less visible and so less likely to be targeted (Corriveau & Greco, 2014; Lewis et al., 2005). However, it must be acknowledged that the option to work indoors is very much limited by one's gender, ethnicity, age, ability, SES, and drug use. Women who do not fall within dominant beauty and social-sexual norms may have a difficult time being hired by massage parlour and escort agencies, as do those whose addiction prohibits them from working long shifts at a massage parlour, or from waiting until the agency secures a date for them (Krüsi et al., 2012; Lazarus et al., 2011; Lazarus et al., 2012).

Condom use. In addition to work setting, strategies to control health and safety risks within the workplace include condom use, relying on intuition, and engaging with others. Authors who have looked at disease prevention report condom use by Women as extremely high, refuting the myth of Women as vectors for disease (Handlovsky, Bungay, & Kolar, 2012; Jackson, Sowinski, Bennett, & Ryan, 2005). Condom negotiation is sometimes reported as a challenge when clients do not want to use one, but Women employ strategies such as secretly putting on a condom with their hands before vaginal or anal sex, or in their mouths before oral sex, or even servicing a client without charge when they felt threatened, but still insisting on condom use (Handlovsky et al., 2012; Jackson et al., 2005; Morrison & Whitehead, 2005). Though it is crucial to occupational safety, condom use is not without risks. Many Women report carrying a limited number of condoms, and many establishments require workers to carry their own instead of making them available through the workplace, because condom possession can be used as evidence of sex work (Handlovsky et al., 2012; O'Doherty, 2011a; van der Meulen & Durisin, 2008).

Women often describe relying on their own intuition to decide whether condom use was necessary (Kolar, Atchison, & Bungay, 2014) or to avoid a dangerous situation (Corriveau & Greco, 2014; Nixon et al., 2002). While the former speaks to a need for HIV and sexual health education, the latter underscores the danger of the communication laws in removing the time necessary for this important safety measure (Lewis et al., 2005). Many Women speak about how negotiating the terms of a transaction beforehand could reduce the risk of a misunderstanding about prices or services offered, avoiding a potentially dangerous confrontation (Lewis et al., 2005; O'Doherty, 2011a, 2011b). Again, this is a strategy made unavailable by the constraints imposed through the current

legal framework. Exerting control over their workplace gives Women a measure of confidence in their ability to avoid some of the dangers to which they may be exposed.

Working with others. Engaging another party can greatly decrease safety risks. Women report working with someone with whom they can check in during a date, who will note a license plate or description, or who knows to contact help if the worker is not heard from after a specified length of time (Lewis et al., 2005). Some agencies employ a driver, security or even reception personnel to discourage harm through their presence (O'Doherty, 2011a; van der Meulen & Durisin, 2008), and supportive housing that allows sex work in the building will sometimes take clients' identification documents or will respond to a predetermined signal (Krüsi et al., 2012; Lazarus et al., 2011; Lowman, 2000).

Accessing and engaging with health, social, and sex work specific resources can also decrease risk by making harm reduction equipment like condoms and clean drug paraphernalia available, and by increasing knowledge about the law, harm reduction strategies, sexual health, and the importance of a strong social network (Bungay et al., 2013; Deering et al., 2011; Janssen et al., 2009; Rabinovitch, 2003). While engaging another party is a successful safety strategy, it can endanger that person under Section 286 (living off the avails), as evidenced by simply being in habitual contact with someone who does sex work. This risk serves to endanger Women, as those who are isolated have been found to be at greater risk for violence and have decreased access to healthcare (Deering et al., 2011; Goldenberg et al., 2014).

Emotional protection. Another important strategy that Women use to minimize risks to their emotional wellbeing includes balancing their identity as a Woman with their other identities such as a partner, parent, or child (Orchard et al., 2013). They also find

ways to resist the stigma associated with sex work, such as stressing that it is a choice and a legitimate occupation, and contrasting themselves with others whom they perceive as lower in the sex work hierarchy, like those who do outdoor work or offer certain services (Morrison & Whitehead, 2005; O'Doherty, 2011a). This is not an area that has been explored sufficiently but it may represent an important topic for research and support, in terms of Women's' identity management and stigma resistance.

These strategies illustrate how Women can exercise agency and exert power within and surrounding their work (Jackson et al., 2005). Interestingly, the law proscribes all of these strategies except identity management and stigma resistance. Under current legislation, sex work must be done alone, in secret, and in isolated places unfamiliar to the Woman. The laws essentially undermine all of the risk mitigation strategies that Women use.

Rights

Many authors call for changes to the current laws—largely in favour of some level of decriminalization or legalization. This discourse is based on the rights of Women to safety and security. In a series of articles (Comte, 2014; van der Meulen, 2010b, 2011, 2012; van der Meulen & Durisin, 2008) based on qualitative interviews in Toronto, the authors focused on Women and sex worker rights activists to generate recommendations for change. This participant-driven work resulted in informed, rights-based strategies for change. The participants stressed that the first step is the recognition of sex work as legitimate labour. This forms the basis for change, because without a shift in attitude regarding agency, discussion will remain in the realm of Women as helpless victims, unable to identify or protect their own best interests (Bruckert & Hannem, 2013). Recognition of sex work as labour requires moving toward a discourse based on rights

and freedoms rather than one of victimization or moral failure (Benoit & Shaver, 2006; van der Meulen, 2011). There is consensus on this point in academia (Lazarus et al., 2012; Lewis et al., 2005; O'Doherty, 2011a; Shaver et al., 2011), but the media and public discourse still tends to revolve around the morality of sex work and Women as either victims or individuals choosing to engage in an immoral and deviant activity (Larter, 2011; Strega et al., 2014; Sutherland, 2004).

van der Meulen (2011) focused on the role of Women in implementing meaningful change. She argued that without the input of workers, policy changes are necessarily ill-informed and doomed to failure. van der Meulen recommended worker-led changes to workplace standards as well as unionization or other labour organizing to advocate for and maintain standards. Homogenous solutions cannot possibly account for the diversity of experiences of Women in Canada, and any positive change will necessarily have to accommodate the range of workers and experiences (Lewis & Maticka-Tyndale, 2000; Maticka-Tyndale, Lewis, & Street, 2005; O'Doherty, 2011a). While the ideal that drives this change is the rights of Women as Canadian labourers, the vehicle through which such rights can be secured remains legal change.

Change to current federal law is recognized by many scholars as necessary to alter the framework that infringes on the rights of individuals engaged in sex work to security of person ("*Canada (Attorney General) v. Bedford*," 2013). Many argue further that only total decriminalization would effectively allow these workers to operate with the same collection of rights afforded any other Canadian labourer. Authors arguing for decriminalization suggest that existing laws regarding extortion, trafficking, assault, public intoxication, and drug use are sufficient to protect those engaged in sex work, other Canadians, and society in general from any illegal activities that may conceivably be

connected with the trade (Comte, 2014; Shaver et al., 2011; van der Meulen, 2011). Bruckert and Hannem (2013) use the example of the gay and lesbian community in the United States as evidence of how decriminalization can be a first step in paving the way for reducing stigma and recognizing the legitimacy of a concept once thought to be immoral. When homosexuality was regulated by criminal law, public perception regarded homosexuals as immoral and policies were enacted to protect the public and discourage homosexuality. Decriminalization opened the door for a shift in attitudes and actions against homosexuality, and the authors argue that the same could happen if sex work was decriminalized.

It must be acknowledged though, that a change in the legislation does not automatically redirect public perceptions and stigma, which are deeply rooted and often internalized by those who experience that stigma and those who project it as normal (Krüsi et al., 2016). At a sex work conference in New Orleans, USA in 2016, I spoke to a number of workers from New Zealand, where sex work is already decriminalized as is often celebrated as the goal in sex work legislation. Workers from New Zealand were decidedly less enthusiastic. They explained that the stigma faced by those who do sex work persists, and that those who are most marginalized still face the worst of it. Working indoors is no longer criminalized, but those experiencing poverty, homelessness, addiction, mental health problems, who are under 18 or face other barriers to conforming to the legislative process still face the greatest stigma and are still at risk of being prosecuted for other offences more than other citizens, including less marginalized workers.

Literature on Photovoice

Arts-based research is growing, presenting and acknowledging different ways of knowing (Boydell, Gladstone, Volpe, Allemang, & Stasiulis, 2012) and giving a voice and a platform to individuals often silenced (Capous-Desyllas, 2013; Castledon, Garvin, & Huu-ay-aht First Nation, 2008; Rumpf, 2017). Photovoice is an arts-based method for data collection, which can be used as a strong political tool for social change because it results in imagery that can convey a deeper message than words alone, from voices not traditionally heard from (Capous-Desyllas, 2013; Jarldorn, 2016; Oliveira, 2018). As such it is often used in community-based or participatory action research (PAR), but can be useful with other methodologies such as this descriptive exploratory research, where the intent is for social change (Rumpf, 2017).

Photovoice was developed by Caroline Wang (1997) in her work with rural Chinese women, where her participants took photos that communicated their health and work situation to local policy makers. The method involves giving participants cameras and asking them to take photos that illustrate certain themes or address a research question. Discussion then occurs, often in a group format, where participants explain their photos, and questions from the researcher or group probe deeper into issues raised. The photos can then be used in targeted exhibitions to give greater power to study results, humanizing participants and providing greater impetus for change than traditional research methods such as interviews (Capous-Desyllas, 2013). Arts-based research such as photovoice can also facilitate the dissemination of research findings to a wider audience beyond academia, which is significant for KTE (Boydell et al., 2012).

Because of its political power and usefulness in offering a platform for traditionally marginalized groups to share their perspectives, photovoice has been used before in research with individuals who do sex work. It has been effective in exploring the needs and aspirations of Women working in Portland, United States of America (Capous-Desyllas, 2014), the private lives of Women in Seoul, South Korea (Cheng, 2013), the daily realities of migrant workers in Johannesburg, and Musina, South Africa (Oliveira, 2018); as well, Smith (2015) used the method to examine the ways that Women working in Victoria, Australia maintain a positive sense of self. In the last project the author chose not to show or publish participant photos because of the risk to their privacy; instead she used the photos only as an interview tool to encourage deeper insights. The other three projects resulted in art exhibitions where the participants' photos were exhibited along with artist captions and explanations. The authors all described the exhibitions as successful in communicating a message to an intended audience and working to dispel stereotypes and myths.

While photovoice can disrupt the power imbalance inherent in traditional research methods, it can also contribute to this imbalance if researchers are not careful in their presentation of participant photos. In showing photovoice works, Shankar (2016) cautions against the portrayal of photos as simply windows into another world where participants are then reduced to "native informants documenting life so that we can get a more authentic glimpse into a reality that is not our own" (p. 159). By instead recognizing participants as artists who created these images using their own aesthetic sense to convey a message, the viewer will understand the participant as an agent with power, which

counteracts what is often assumed about those, such as Women, in traditionally marginalized positions.

When starting with the recognition of participants as artists creating works for a purpose, photovoice has the power to create rich data with deeper insight than interviews alone (Boydell et al., 2012). The process of making the photo can elicit strong emotion associated with a memory, the time between taking the photo and the interview can allow time for reflection and insight, and the photo discussion interview can bring together that emotion, depth, and insight to provide not only more but even different data than might result from an interview alone (Rumpf, 2017).

Photovoice offers participants a chance to dictate their own narrative and set its parameters. By choosing what to photograph and how to set up the photo, they control the focus of the conversation. This is an important ideological shift from traditional researcher-driven questioning. The process of setting up and taking photos as artistic expression can be a positive outlet for participants. Authors discussed how their participants gained confidence from learning or discovering a new skill (Rumpf, 2017; Shankar, 2016), and others described the process as cathartic or healing, allowing participants to revisit a painful or traumatic event in a gentler or more controlled way than simply being asked about it and recounting the event (Rumpf, 2017). The artistic process gives the artist control, which is empowering and can also be liberating.

Photovoice provides many benefits to the research process, including a long overdue shift in the power balance, offering creative control to participants and allowing them to direct the conversation. The final product can also be richer than with interviews alone, providing deeper, more insightful data. In addition, the format facilitates KTE in

providing an optimum medium for greater impact, and makes dissemination more accessible to a wider audience.

Summary

This review of Canadian literature has shown the contextual nature of the current legal framework in affecting all aspects of Women's experiences in larger urban areas. It must be noted, though, that the greater body of literature to date does not extend to smaller cities and rural areas so generalizations of transferability cannot yet be made.

Violence is a social structure that affects Women on an individual level. It represents a barrier to safety, health, and wellness, and studies indicate that those working outdoors disproportionately experience it. At a societal level, laws, policing strategies act and stigma act as systemic barriers to the health and safety of Women. The perception that structures are constraining influences on the experiences of those who do sex work is reflected in most of the current literature. This approach, however, lacks an important acknowledgment of Women as agents who actively make choices and decisions that help mitigate some of the risks they face. Beyond agency at the level of the individual, literature on enabling agency at a societal level focuses on redefining sex work as legitimate labour deserving of the full suite of labour rights, recognizing the role of Women as necessary in creating meaningful change, and making changes in legislation to legitimize and support such a shift.

Chapter Three: Research Design

"*Nothing about us, without us!*" This slogan has become iconic in sex work advocacy, and posters displaying it can be seen at every march, memorial, and gathering that involves the topic of sex work. It was important for me that this research reflects this value, centres on Women, and is informed by the issues they themselves identify as important.

In this chapter I discuss the theoretical framework on which the research was based. I used social constructionism to guide the development and conduct of the project. I relied on feminist standpoint theory to ground the research in the perspective of the participants who guided the data, and used feminist intersectionality to explain individual differences in experiences based on gender, age, ethnicity, and social class. Next I explain the ethical considerations for this research, which come from the Tri-Council Policy Statement's (TCPS-2) three core principles (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, National Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2014). Finally, I provide the research methods, including an explanation of the descriptive exploratory methodology that guides this research, a description of the research setting, and an explanation of participant recruitment strategies. I explain how more traditional unstructured interviews complemented arts-based photovoice as data collection methods, yielding rich data for thematic analysis. I describe the methods I employed, as well as my data management and analysis strategies. The chapter finishes with details of how I ensured rigour in the research process, and my plans for KTE.

Theoretical Framework

This research is framed within a social constructionism philosophy. It draws on feminist intersectionality to acknowledge the multiple identity points that contribute to individual experiences, as well as feminist standpoint theory to understand these experiences within a larger social context. My own experiences, beliefs, and choices are implicated throughout, as I designed, implemented, and present the research. I have endeavoured to be reflexive about my role and to convey as clearly as possible my thinking, so that readers are able to make their own informed opinions.

Social Constructionism

Social constructionism is a post-modern philosophical paradigm that posits that identity, social norms, and institutions are socially constructed through practices that are cultural, political, and interactional. This is a relativist paradigm, meaning there is no single enduring or pre-existing objective reality to be known, there is only what is created and lived at the moment by those involved (Raskin, 2002). In this research I will not be seeking a "truth" from an objective, outside view, but instead I will be attempting to describe and explain how interactions with community members, clients, and agencies act to construct participants' perceptions and experiences. I will discuss how the social norms and institutions participants interact within, as well as their own identities are continually being created and recreated by their participation and by their interactions with others. This aligns with my own desire to honour the multiplicity of experiences and voices among my participants, as there is no universal set of experiences that captures those of all Women.

Moreover, in conducting this research my own interactions with participants also served as a social engagement where our actions and words created a 'reality' that I have

translated into this work. The presentation of participants' experiences is not an objective outside reporting of 'facts' that exist separate from myself and could be reported in the same way by any other researcher. Rather, the interaction between the participants and myself, filtered through the research process—complete with my own knowledge and biases, created what I present as participants' experiences in this thesis. It is also understood by each reader, in an interaction between their own knowledge and biases and my words, in an act of social construction that will differ for each (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The importance of viewing this work from a social constructionism lens is that such an approach acknowledges the researcher, the reader, and the participant as complicit actors in creating an understanding.

Feminist Standpoint Theory

Feminist standpoint theory begins with the view that women occupy unique and separate positions from men. These positions come with expectations about appropriate behaviour and roles, and individuals occupying them are afforded different (often lesser) power, rights, and opportunities (Wood, 2009). Women are excluded because society does not make room for them beyond those narrow roles and expectations, and so they are often viewed as a threat to the norms within their gender, which leads to stigma, gender discrimination, and moral and judicial policing. Their standpoint at the lower end of the patriarchal power system means that they are best able to describe its workings (Hartsock, 2004). Operating from these positions necessarily influences experience, knowledge, and identity. It is essential when understanding experiences of Women to contextualize the individual intersections that create identity and dictate the power to enact agency, within the othered space that Women occupy, which relegates sexuality to monogamous heteronormativity.

I am using a feminist theory not to perpetuate the inaccurate assumption that everyone engaged in sex work is female, but because the norms surrounding sex work are so gendered (Morrison & Whitehead, 2007). In fact male and transgendered sex workers are even further marginalized than their female counterparts because they fail to fit within social norms for gender or even for their occupation (Lewis et al., 2005; Morrison & Whitehead, 2007; Seshia, 2010). Larter (2011, p. 38) uses feminist theory to understand the "victim blaming, rescue language, the implicit and explicit division between bad [W]omen and good women" in media discourse about murdered Women in Edmonton. My use of feminist standpoint theory prioritizes the participants' narratives as those best situated to understand the structural and personal oppressions that are imposed on their lives, as well as their own actions to mediate against those.

Feminist Intersectionality

I use feminist intersectionality in my analysis of the data in this research project. Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term in 1989 as a way of acknowledging the multiple factors at play in understanding differential experiences of gendered power relations. She was concerned with the experiences of women of colour being marginalized in both feminist and anti-racist discourse, particularly because she saw that such discourse at the time was only looking at oppression based on gender or on race. She argued that the intersection of gender *and* race must be accounted for in order to recognize intergroup differences and more accurately represent the whole (Crenshaw, 1989). Crenshaw expanded the concept and recognized the application beyond gender and race to include other identities such as class and sexuality that individualize an experience (Crenshaw, 1991). The concept of intersectionality has been an important addition to feminist approaches to understanding experience, as it accounts for the defining but often ignored

differences among individual identities that result in an array of experiences within groups (Davis, 2008).

This lens can be applied to understanding the experiences of Women in that it examines the intersection of multiple identities (Crenshaw, 1991) such as ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, class, and identity as a Woman (Mehrabadi et al., 2008; Orchard et al., 2013) in shaping unique experiential differences. This recognition of Women as a heterogeneous group allows for a more nuanced understanding of the ways that structures such as race and class can impinge on individual agency.

An important aspect of feminist intersectionality theory, as opposed to simply a combination of agency and structure, is that it distinguishes between agency and freedom. All individuals have agency and make choices that affect their experiences. However, accounting for the effects of the intersection of specific identities acknowledges that the amount of freedom to influence change is relative, because structural barriers constrain agency enactment (Choby & Clark, 2014). For example, a private escort who is *also* Caucasian *and* female *and* 25-years-old will have significantly more freedom than a street-based Woman who is *also* Indigenous *and* trans-gendered *and* suffers from addiction. Both sex Women have agency to make choices that can impact their own experiences, but the amount of freedom that the first Woman has to make positive changes to her situation is likely greater than that of the second. Certainly some of the same structures are acting on both individuals, but feminist intersectionality recognizes that their experiences will differ based on the specific intersections of those multiple points of identity, and that both experiences make up the complex picture of the whole.

Feminist intersectionality accounts for the specific intersections of multiple identity points that act together to allow relative freedom to shape experience within those

confines. This approach differentiates one experience from another in the same group and allows for a more in-depth analysis. I use feminist intersectionality in my analysis because I think it is important that the next wave of knowledge-building moves beyond the more absolute ways of knowing behind a strictly structure or agency approach, toward a more relative subjectivity (Code, 1993) that accounts for differentiation of experiences and identity among Women.

Ethical Considerations

I sought ethical guidance for this research from the Tri-Council Policy Statement's (TCPS-2) (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2014) three core principles: *Respect for persons* was accomplished by ensuring free, informed and ongoing consent, of which participants were reminded at each meeting (see Appendix B for consent form). *Concern for welfare* includes ensuring privacy and confidentiality, and that participants understood the benefits of participation, such as the chance to talk about experiences in a safe, non-judgmental and confidential space, and participation in a project that has the power to effect meaningful change for local Women. Participants were also made aware of potential risks such as emotional distress. *Concern for justice* refers to fair and equitable treatment, by accommodating participant concerns and needs and fulfilling my responsibility to disseminate findings as an act of advocacy.

Throughout the research, I was conscious of these principles. When potentially sensitive topics arose, I always asked if the participant wanted to proceed with the topic. On occasion participants declined and I respected this decision. When someone appeared distressed, I informed them of counselling services and one participant accepted this offer. In addition, I was continually aware of protecting anonymity. One participant took several photos that featured some of her artwork. Originally, she said I could use any of

her photos in publications and presentations; however, I reminded her that this could potentially "out" her as a Woman and she reconsidered. Instead, she agreed that I could use the photos in analysis and to share with other participants, but not to display publicly.

Research Method

This research began with a broad question—what is it like to do sex work in a small urban centre? My curiosity and concern came from my work with Women in Vancouver, and what I had learned there about how appropriate services can make a positive impact on their everyday experiences. I felt that the lack of such services here must be impacting daily realities, but without actually speaking to Women I had no way to know what it is actually like to work here and what they might need or want.

Descriptive Exploratory Approach

As Women in Lethbridge have not yet had the opportunity to give voice to their experiences, a descriptive exploratory design was appropriate (Powers, 2010). The descriptive aspect of the design examines the characteristics and key elements of a poorly understood phenomenon, and the exploratory aspect delves into further depth about its processes (Polit & Beck, 2013). In particular, photovoice interviews allowed participants to describe in detail their experiences. They directed the conversation by choosing what to photograph, and then together we explored their experiences on a deeper level through our conversation—critically examining the structures and interactions that shaped them, as well as how they fit within the larger picture of Women's experiences in Canada.

A descriptive exploratory design is appropriate not only when little is known about a topic (Brink & Wood, 1997), but also when that lack is best filled by consulting those most affected by it (Grove, Burns, & Gray, 2013). According to feminist standpoint theory, the larger social order is better understood by those who occupy the more

marginalized position, as they are more likely to understand their own as well as the dominant group's positions (Hartsock, 2004; Wood, 2009). For that reason it was important to me that while I acknowledge my role in constructing the information in this thesis, I also endeavored to present it as true to my understanding of participants' intent as possible, recognizing that I acted as a filter in that process.

I have knowledge and experience working with Women in Vancouver, British Columbia, I have immersed myself in the literature, and I have attended conferences run and attended by empowered Women. However, I have never done sex work. I am cis-gendered, relatively young, able-bodied, university educated, and I appear Caucasian (although I identify as Indigenous). I do not occupy the same social position as the participants, and my own goals that prompted me to do this research come from that place of privilege. I believe that even though many Women experience violence and marginalization, sex work is not inherently dangerous or negative, and that many Women do not have these unfortunate experiences. To that end my main research question: "What are the experiences of several women who engage in sex work in Lethbridge?" was intentionally broad and sweeping, allowing participants to guide the research and share what they felt was important to understand about their experiences.

Photovoice in Descriptive Exploratory Research

I chose photovoice as a data collection method specifically because it can provide a more direct link between participants and readers, and can facilitate readers coming to their own understandings of participant photos (Capous-Desyllas, 2014). Photovoice is a data collection method where the researcher provides cameras to participants, with direction to take photos that address the research question or a specific theme (Castledon et al., 2008; Wilkin & Liamputtong, 2010). Reflection and discussion about the photos

then takes place, often in groups, to analyze and interpret the meanings together (Wang, Morrel-Samuels, Hutchison, Bell, & Pestronk, 2004). The four goals of this method as described by Wang and Burris (1997) include: encouraging discussion around a topic; creating a safe environment for discussion and reflection; helping to mobilize people to recognize a need for action in certain areas of their lives; and allowing their ideas to be disseminated to facilitate change. Photovoice goes beyond asking for participant comments to validate data, and instead integrates participants as contributors to data collection and analysis. In this way the method gives more ownership of the project and results to the participants, involving them in the co-production of knowledge—doing research *with* Women rather than *on* Women (Capous-Desyllas, 2014).

This aspect of photovoice in particular appealed to me. As a community-based health nurse working in addictions, I place a high value on collaborating *with* the client on their journey rather than doing health interventions *on* or *to* them. I do not find that top-down approaches are effective, and they do not respect, value, or encourage the client's own power in making meaningful change in their lives as supportive partnerships do. My education and experience means that I have some expertise and therefore a role to play, but it is just that, a role, a part in a larger whole. My part means nothing without the client making decisions and leading the way on their own path. This research project is similar. My education as a graduate student researcher gives me a certain expertise and allows me to play a role—to do background research, design a study, collect data, analyze it, and write about it (all under the guidance of my supervisor and committee). However, that role is meaningless without the willingness of the participants to share their knowledge and insights. In the case of photovoice participants are contributing even more by actively collecting and analyzing data. It is important to me that I follow their lead and that they

direct the research because it is about their experiences. Their contribution is what makes this a research project. Otherwise, it would only be an academic exercise.

The strength of photovoice is its involvement of participants in meaningful data collection and analysis, which can facilitate discussion and illustrate a need for change (Wang et al., 2004). It also results in powerful artistic product that can be used to share participant voices to a larger audience (Capous-Desyllas, 2014). Most importantly, photovoice shares the direct perspective of the participant with the reader, which has the potential to change negative stereotypes by humanizing participants for the reader (Capous-Desyllas, 2013). While the analysis and discussion offered in this thesis is the product of a joint effort between participants and myself and carries my influence as the researcher and writer, the photos are the participants' work only. Though I chose the context in which to share each photo, and I wrote the thesis in which each is situated, the photos represent the most direct link between participant and reader. Photovoice allows for "the possibility of perceiving the world from the viewpoint of the people who live lives that are different from those traditionally in control of the means for imagining the world" (Ruby, 1991, p. 50). The shift in power from researcher to participant is important. It is often employed in emancipatory work like PAR, but is also very useful in this descriptive exploratory work where little is known about the experiences of Women in this setting, and participants are best situated to inform us (Capous-Desyllas, 2013).

The Research Setting

Lethbridge is a small, southern Alberta city with a population of just over 98 000 (Government of Alberta, 2017) and is surrounded by small towns, rural municipalities, and First Nations reserves. The city serves as a regional economic, social service, criminal justice, education, administration, and healthcare centre. The Lethbridge has a

spatial relationship as a central hub, and so the population of those who engage in sex work here is somewhat transient (police constable, personal communication, September 28, 2014), and they may not know where to access services. There are currently no sex-work specific programs, though local resources such as the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and other harm reduction and outreach service agencies provide important safety and support measures that are accessed by local Women.

In addition to the political climate, the cold climate in winter may also impact the amount of sex work that happens in public view. The comparatively underground nature of sex work here (police constable, personal communication, September 28, 2014) may affect the service needs of local workers. It is possible that there is a greater need for social and legal support as opposed to health and safety advocacy and change, as the Canadian research literature indicates that indoor workers face fewer threats to their health and safety than do their outdoor peers (Corriveau & Greco, 2014; O'Doherty, 2011b; Shaver et al., 2011). However, it can also mean that there is less of a peer support and safety network, the absence of which can impede outdoor worker safety strategies (Lazarus et al., 2011; Lewis et al., 2005; Shannon, Kerr, et al., 2008). I did not ask specific questions, instead I followed topics led by participant photos, but participants raised all of these issues above during the interviews.

Participant Recruitment

Privacy is a primary concern for many Women. Their business depends on their ability to be discreet, which is perhaps even more difficult in a smaller community (Jeffrey & MacDonald, 2006). This, along with widespread stigma, fear about exposing themselves to the legal system, and my own lack of social capital because I had no prior relationship with workers here and had not worked with any in this community, posed a

significant challenge to recruitment for this project (Benoit, Jansson, Millar, & Phillips, 2005).

In order to overcome some of these recruiting challenges I engaged local service agencies and individuals who already work with local Women. I hoped that building on existing relationships would help me to establish rapport and trust (Benoit et al., 2005). Local service agencies that identified Women among those who utilize their services agreed to display my posters and speak to known workers about my project. Management and staff at all of these agencies were supportive and seemed very interested in the project. I also asked them if there was anything that they would like to see come out of the project. Management at one agency spoke of a need for increased outreach and harm reduction services, and another asked if I could identify what Women might like to see in a drop-in facility, and spread the word about services they offer. They admitted that few Women utilized their services, and felt like that was a problem of a lack of knowledge about their services. However, even with agency enthusiasm and follow-up visits to ensure posters (Appendix C) were up and that staff were talking to Women about the project, I did not recruit any participants from these agencies. The reason for this failure is unclear, but it speaks to the gaps between Women and local services. It is also unfortunate for this research because these services represented my most likely "in" with outdoor Women.

I engaged a lawyer who has an interest in sex work laws and often represents local workers, as well as a constable in the local police force, who both agreed to speak to several Women they know and thought might talk to me. Unfortunately, both the lawyer and police officer informed me that at the time of data collection, the two Women they knew that were most likely to speak to me were unavailable—one was incarcerated and

the other was in psychiatric care. Staff at one of the service agencies also reported the same. I noted that all the agencies and services seemed to know these two Women, and I asked these stakeholders if that is because the city is small. They all replied that many of the Women who worked outdoors were known to all of them because they access services through the agencies and have a relationship with the police. They also told me that there is another segment of outdoor workers that is more transient or does not work regularly. Staff at the agencies and police also reported being aware of but not being in contact with male and trans sex workers. These individuals are not accessing services and are not known by police. While anonymity may be desirable for them, they could be at greater risk if they do not know where to seek services or do not feel comfortable accessing them, should they need them (Goldenberg et al., 2014).

In addition to service organizations I also placed posters on notice boards at the community sexual health clinic, an addictions clinic (where I work as a nurse), around the university and college, at the university Campus Women's Centre, the university PRIDE Centre, and at numerous bars and hotels around the city.

Data Collection: Photovoice and Interviews

When I first learned about photovoice during my graduate studies, I knew that this was a data collection method that would fit well with this research project. Often used in emancipatory work such as PAR, photovoice can be a powerful tool for artistic self-representation (Capous-Desyllas, 2014; Wang, Yi, Tao, & Carovano, 1998). It offers a creative way for participants to directly communicate with an audience, an alternative platform for traditionally marginalized groups to express themselves, and offers visual images that can be more impactful than words alone (Capous-Desyllas, 2014).

I had not intended to conduct interviews separately from the photovoice analysis that is done with participants to understand the photos they took. However, when I met with participants initially in order to go over the project, discuss and sign consent forms, and give them cameras, each meeting evolved into a spontaneous unstructured interview. This was unexpected, as I had not encountered this in any of the literature on using the photovoice method. Participants expressed excitement at the opportunity to share their stories in a unique way, and gratitude that someone was taking the time to listen to their often-silenced voices. One participant appreciated the chance to tell about her experiences and explain about her world. "No one ever asks to hear my stories. You do. Because there's a bigger picture to it all" (Nicole, independent escort work).

These impromptu interviews complemented photovoice well in that they gave me insight from participants' point of view into some of the themes I had identified from the literature. Thus when themes emerged in photovoice discussion with participants, I was better able to recognize them and ask follow-up questions to elicit greater depth than I might have otherwise. This resulted in two interviews, one impromptu and unstructured before participants took their photos, and one photovoice discussion interview afterward.

For example, I noted physical health and safety, and mental health as common topics that were raised in early interviews and in the literature. Then, during an initial interview, a participant asked me if I had any questions related to grounding and emotional wellness as she identified this as the most important part of surviving and of thriving in her work. I added a section to that effect in my interview guide, but also did not need to use it. Other participants referred to the idea in one way or another, but I may not have recognized it as such if the participant had not challenged me. Grounding and emotional wellness are deeper and more meaningful than health, safety and mental health,

and her insights allowed me to understand participants' mention of things like their artwork as more than simply positive for their mental health, and ask questions that confirmed that it was indeed a means for grounding and wellness to balance negativity from their life and specifically their work.

Photovoice. During the first meeting, participants were given an information sheet about the project (Appendix D) and the consent form (Appendix B). We discussed in detail how I would protect anonymity, the potential risks and benefits of participation, and what would be asked of each individual. At this time they were also told that there would be an honorarium of $25 for each of the two meetings in order to show my appreciation for sharing their time, knowledge, and insight. They were assured that participation was entirely voluntary and that they could decline to answer any questions or withdraw at any time without penalty. Once they agreed to participate, the consent form was signed and the remainder of the meeting was audio recorded. Participants were offered a sheet with some tips for photography (Appendix E) with a disposable camera as well as some ideas for themes for the photos. I stressed that participants should feel free to take photos of anything they wanted to tell me about, but if they needed ideas, these were some of the common themes from the literature and from my experience. It was important to me that participants were able to direct the topic of conversation in any way they thought was important, but I also recognize that it might be stressful to have little or no direction.

After the initial interview, participants used the disposable cameras (one chose to use her cellular phone instead) to make photos that illustrated their experiences doing sex work in Lethbridge. They were asked to contact me when they had finished or if they needed another camera. Participants averaged one to two weeks to complete their photos.

They contacted me and I picked up the cameras to print the photos, and we set up a second meeting.

Second interview. The second set of meetings centered on analysis of participant photos. Photovoice discussion generally occurs in a group format (Wang & Burris, 1997); however, in order to respect participants' privacy, I offered them the option of meeting with me as a group or individually to discuss their photos. Several of the participants initially said they might like to have this discussion with other participants that they knew, and during the initial interviews two of the participants who were friends interviewed together, but all ultimately decided on individual interviews for the photovoice discussion. The literature indicates that a benefit of group discussion is that it allows other participants to comment on each other's photos and extend ideas (Wang & Burris, 1997). In order to retain some of that benefit, participants were shown other participants' photos with consent, told what the photographer comments on the photo were, and asked about their thoughts. While it was not a dialogue among participants, it did offer different perspectives and insights for data analysis.

I had an interview guide prepared (Appendix F) in case any participants decided to participate but not take photos, or in case there were major ideas from the literature that were not covered through the photovoice discussion. I looked through the guide at the end of each interview, but did not actually ask any questions from it because in most cases all of the topics had been covered through our conversation. Though I did not use it as an interview guide, I found it useful because preparing it helped me recognize important concepts when they arose, even if they were not the focal point of the conversation. I was then able to ask questions to probe deeper into what may have been only briefly mentioned.

There are several potential approaches to analyzing photovoice data with participants. I started with the SHOWeD method to guide photo analysis. I invited participants to tell the story surrounding their photos, and to analyze their own photos using the acronym SHOWeD: What do you SEE here? What is really HAPPENING here? How does this relate to OUR experiences? WHY does this problem or strength exist? What can we DO about this (Wang et al., 2004)? The method helps to "identify the problem or the asset, critically discuss the roots of the situation, and develop strategies for changing the situation" (Wang et al., 1998, p. 80). I feel that Women face social stigma, and I thought this analysis approach would facilitate a critical discussion of their experiences, and potentially lead to their own development of strategies for change. However, I did not find the SHOWeD method worked well in this context. Participants seemed to find it awkward and forced. They appeared to relax and offer more detail when I left out the SHOWeD questions and invited them simply to tell me why they took that photo and what they wanted me to know about it.

After our collaborative analysis of each of their photos, I asked participants which of the photos they were comfortable with me showing other participants, which I could print and publish, and which they would rather I not share. (See Appendix G for photo consent form). Finally, participants were shown a selection of photos taken by other participants (with consent), as well as a brief synopsis of what the photographers said about them. They were asked for their insight, adding an alternative perspective to their peers' analyses. This added some of the depth that was lost by not having group photovoice analysis.

After reflecting on the failure of the SHOWeD method in this context, I recognize that preparing the participants for the SHOWeD questions might have facilitated the

discussion better. I had asked participants to consider why they chose to make each photo, and make a note in a small notebook I had given them. Had I prepared the notebooks with the SHOWeD questions, they might have had time to think about those questions ahead of time, and feel more comfortable and prepared to answer them.

However, this failure could also represent a strength of photovoice as a participant-led method. Participants were not responding to my questions, they were not engaging because the SHOWeD questions did not fit with their own agenda, their own narratives that they wanted to share with me. When I relinquished my control as researcher directing the process with my agenda and my questions, and allowed them to take control as narrators of their own stories, the conversation flowed and they led us to much more depth than may have happened if they only answered my narrow questions about the singular meaning behind each photo. Often our conversations went far beyond their initial synopsis about what the photo was about for them, because as they opened up about what it meant and how it made them feel, and with prompting questions to probe deeper, conversation often went far beyond the bounds of what was included in each photo. What was beyond the frame seemed to matter just as much as what was captured in it.

For example, Darlene's image "Grounding" of the games and artwork she uses as tools for grounding after work turned into a long discussion about her different roles at work and at home, and how she negotiated the boundaries between those with her partner and others in her life. We talked about her priorities, and how she would recognize when she needed to quit doing sex work, when she or her partner felt that she was unable to successfully maneuver between the two worlds, or when the stress and difficulties from her work started making her detach from those at home. This depth and breadth may not

have come if she had simply answered my questions about "what do you SEE here, what is really HAPPENING… The dialogue likely would have stayed focused on grounding techniques, which was important, but it would have missed the identity work entirely.

Data Management

Interviews were audio recorded with participant permission and transcribed verbatim using ExpressScribe software (NCH Software Ltd., 2014). Only pseudonyms and numbers were used to identify transcribed interviews, with all identifying information such as names or references to particular places removed. Only the consent forms and demographic sheets retain participants' real names as well as the pseudonym for cross-reference, and these, as well as the transcribed interviews and participant photos, were stored in a locked cabinet to which I have sole access. Transcribed interviews, photos, and notes were stored electronically for analysis using NVivo 10 for Mac qualitative software management program (QSR International Ltd., 2014). This program was accessed solely on a password-protected computer. All information will be destroyed as confidential waste five years after study completion. Privacy and confidentiality is of utmost concern in any research, but particularly so in this case where participants are potentially vulnerable and the topic is highly sensitive.

Data Analysis: Photovoice and Transcripts

Photovoice. With photovoice, there are two stages to data analysis (Palibroda, Krieg, Murdock, & Havelock, 2009). Initial analysis, described above, is a combined effort between researcher and participant. This process of involving participants in analysis respects participants as knowledgeable contributors to the research process. This collaboration challenges the power imbalance in traditional research that focuses on the

researcher as the expert outsider (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and has the power to yield greater depth of analysis.

Transcripts. The second stage of data analysis is of the transcribed interviews and is driven by the researcher (Palibroda et al., 2009). Descriptive exploratory methodology does not have a particular data analysis method tied to it as some other methodologies do, so to analyze the transcribed interviews I used Braun and Clarke's (2013) six phases of thematic analysis. These include: (1) familiarizing myself with the data by reading and re-reading transcripts and listening to audio recordings; (2) developing a coding framework by identifying important points; (3) searching for themes by noting connections and patterns in the codes; (4) reviewing the themes by checking them against the full data set, including participants' analyses of their own photos (Palibroda et al., 2009); (5) defining and naming themes by identifying the essence of each; (6) and writing up the narrative with contextual details.

Thematic analysis is both deductive, in that meaning is not discovered but constructed by the researcher (Castledon et al., 2008), and inductive in that the development of a coding framework comes from the data set. It is informed by everything the researcher brings into it, but codes are not decided prior to engaging with the data. This approach is more time consuming than a strictly deductive one, but it allowed me to ask specific questions during the second interviews to clarify or probe more deeply into an idea, and to incorporate concepts not previously considered (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

The coding framework was developed by reading printed transcripts and looking for ideas that came up multiple times, seemed to hold importance for a participant, or struck me as similar to or different from what was being said by other participants or in the literature. I wrote notes, and connected emerging codes and themes with notes and

explanations and thoughts to both transcripts and photos using NVivo software. I tried to be reflexive about my own role and assumptions, discussed my evolving understanding with peers who work with Women and those who do not, and contacted several participants during this process to ask for clarification.

Once I had decided on codes and themes, I went through the transcripts and photos again, matching up transcript sections and photos with the appropriate codes and themes, changing the wording or explanations as my understanding of the data changed. In final presentation of participants' voices and photos in Chapter Four, I chose photos and quotes that were best representative of the themes I had created, and that explained participant experiences within those themes.

Thematic analysis is not a linear process but an iterative one. For example, I had defined and named themes and even written an initial thesis draft at one point. However, after personal circumstances necessitated a leave away from the work, I noticed on my return that I began to look at the data differently and my understanding continued to grow and change through the presentation of study findings and during subsequent discussions with university students and professors. The findings and discussion in the next two chapters reflect this evolution.

Rigour

Trustworthiness (Corbin & Strauss, 2014) is established in this research in the following ways: multiple, lengthy interviews; triangulation of methods; peer debriefing; the inclusion and presentation of any negative cases; and, most importantly, member-checks to ensure *credibility and authenticity.* Maintaining an audit trail with detailed notes on reflection and reflexivity can provide *dependability and confirmability,* while

thick description will allow readers to reach their own conclusions of appropriate *transferability*.

I wrote notes throughout the development of this project and those will became an important part of the audit trail. In addition to the changes in study design, I wrote reflexively about what I brought to the project, and how I influenced the analysis through my attitudes, choices, and interactions with participants. I also relied on the insight of my committee to help me recognize what I sometimes could not. For example, as a nurse I was convinced from the beginning that I should offer harm reduction equipment during interviews. This came without thought for me; obviously, condoms are an important safety measure and obviously as a nurse it is my duty to provide them. My supervisor and other members of my committee challenged me on my rationale for this, and even then I defended the decision. In my experience as an outreach nurse on the stroll in Vancouver, condoms are a conversation opener, a way to begin a dialogue. Women there are familiar with the outreach teams and are generally happy to see them. Outreach workers offer condoms, a snack or warm drink, and ask about the workers' night. Even for those who spoke to me about not using condoms, they expected that without passing judgment I would encourage condom use. It is harm reduction.

My committee gently suggested that I reexamine this stance in light of my position as a researcher rather than a nurse in this project. They encouraged me to consider how offering condoms might be viewed as judgmental and normative. I now understand this and chose not to offer them, but the process of setting aside my usual "nurse attitudes" is still something with which I struggle. I do not feel that my attitude is judgmental, but I definitely tend to want to address a perceived problem or encourage healthy behaviours. I have to be conscious of simply listening when a participant talks

about her choices instead of immediately asking nursing assessment questions that a participant might feel requires a correct response, such as, "yes, I always insist on condoms."

Reflexivity is crucial to acknowledging how I influence the research process, interact with the participant to construct a dialogue, and then create meaning from that interaction (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). With that awareness I have employed a tool from anthropology. Geertz (1973) describes thick description as the process of providing thorough context in a description so that readers can come to their own understandings. This recognizes that while I have influenced the research and therefore the findings, readers may bring their own knowledge and assumptions to it and reach different conclusions than I have. Qualitative research rejects positivist notions of inherent truths (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and instead offers one interpretation while allowing for others.

Knowledge Translation and Exchange

It is important for me that this research does not end only with writing a thesis. The impetus came from the realization that there are few services for Women in Lethbridge, and the knowledge of how detrimental that might be. I hope that the information offered by participants can be used to inform service providers and perhaps increase or change available services. Even more importantly, I hope that the project will increase awareness and understanding about Women's experiences, and promote acceptance without judgment. It represents a platform for participants to have a voice and convey what they feel is important for service providers and the public to know.

Academic Contributions

There is a gap in the current literature about the effect of place on Women's experiences. I aim to take an initial step in filling that, and by doing so, add depth to the larger body of literature on the subject. Journal publication is one of the most common ways of disseminating findings, though conference participation may have a significant impact in terms of transferability and applicability, as dialogue at these events can facilitate conversations about how the findings may be relevant to other particular locations. To date I have attended one international conference, the Desiree Alliance Sex Worker's Rights Movement Conference in New Orleans in 2016, where I presented my findings from this research.. I received positive feedback from those engaged in sex work, activists and academics who attended my presentation and who appreciated this as "strength-building and positive," "creative, arts-based research."

Beyond Academia

Conversations with local police officers and service providers have indicated that the needs of Women are not being met, so I will also offer suggestions to local service providers from these seven participants, for changes to address needs they identified. While this work is not intended to represent the needs or potential changes for all Women in Lethbridge, it can still inform service provision because it represents what these Women in Lethbridge identified. In addition, my own experience reinforces findings in the literature regarding ill-informed and misguided public knowledge about Women that perpetuates stigma and justifies harmful laws. Photovoice lends itself well to highlighting an issue and presenting a starting point for conversation. A series of exhibitions will be held to showcase the findings of the research, specifically tailored to each group: police and city licensing officials; healthcare and social service providers; youth in the local

addiction treatment centre; university students; and the general public. I will present an executive summary of the findings and select photos for illustration, in order to raise awareness of issues raised by participants. The details of these exhibitions have not yet been set, but in my initial conversations with providers before recruitment began they were enthusiastic about hearing the study results. A personal blog, or publication on existing on-line communities such as SHIFT, a Calgary based organization that offers support for Women and education for community members (www.shiftcalgary.org), are alternative platforms for disseminating study findings.

To date I have spoken as a guest lecturer at numerous university undergraduate classes. Students came from a variety of disciplines including nursing, public health, social work, and women and gender studies, and they represent potential future service providers who may connect with Women. One student confided that she had done sex work in the past. Overwhelmingly the feedback has been positive in that students found the conversation enlightening and seem to have come away with new understandings about sex work; some have admitted that their assumptions had been challenged and that they hold a new perspective. This is important, and I plan to continue the discussion to ensure it does not stop there.

Several participants have asked me what my goals are for this research and what I hope will realistically come from it, given the stigma they know surrounds their work. At the individual level, my hope is that this research will act to broaden people's understandings of real-life experiences of Women in their community and to humanize Women. At the agency level, I hope to inform service provision for Women. One agency has asked for feedback on a drop-in centre for women at risk, including those engaged in sex work, and others have shown interest in hearing the study results, so I know that key

players are interested in hearing what this small sample of Women have to say. That is a start.

Summary

Little is known about sex work in small urban and rural areas in Canada; thus, a descriptive exploratory research design allowed me to listen to and understand the experiences of these seven Women. Further, framing the design in the assumptions of a socially constructed reality, with an acknowledgment of intersecting individual identity points and the broader social contextualization that comes from feminist standpoint theory, I was able to build a more complete understanding of what shaped these participant experiences. I chose photovoice as a data collection method because it respects participant knowledge and insight, inviting participants to shape the conversation. It also provides powerful imagery to showcase findings. Impromptu, unstructured initial interviews illustrate participant engagement with the project and provide valuable insight, and discussions about participant photos in photovoice discussion interviews afterward generated rich data. Data analysis began with participant analysis of their own and their peers' photos and continued with my own detailed thematic analysis of the interviews. This collaboration provided deeper insight than if I had completed analysis alone.

In addressing the gap in knowledge I plan to publish and present findings both academically and in Lethbridge, addressing the question—what are the experiences of several women who engage in sex work in Lethbridge? The research provides insight from these participants and offers a description and explanation of their lives, including what they would like to see changed.

Chapter Four: Findings

In this chapter, I present the major findings from this research. I asked seven Women to take photos that addressed the research question, "What are your experiences of sex work in Lethbridge?" Our subsequent interviews involved conversation around the photos they took, providing context and background to their art. The chapter begins with a table of demographics and brief biography of each participant to give the reader a sense of who is speaking and who took the photos. I have organized the rest of the chapter around the three themes that emerged from analysis of participants' photos and thematic analysis of our interviews.

The first theme is *performing identities: "I'm not a whore, I'm not a slut, I'm not a skank, I'm just me."* In this theme, I explore how participants constructed separate identities for their different roles as individuals, partners, mothers, and Women. This separation allowed them to perform each, even when the roles might otherwise contradict each other, like partner and Woman.

The second theme is *boundaries control intimacy: "You actually have to physically and emotionally attach yourself to another human and then detach yourself immediately after."* In this theme, I explain how participants set boundaries with their clients for their own emotional protection. I look at the tools participants used—substance use and mental disengagement to avoid intimacy with clients entirely. I also describe ways in which they used their sex work identities to allow some level of bounded intimacy—by connecting and immediately disconnecting with clients, and by using acting to engage while also maintaining some separation. Participants performed their sex work identities in order to control intimacy with their clients, which allowed them to maintain separation between their work and home roles, and therefore protect themselves

emotionally. These tactics are also noted in research from other literature from larger urban centres.

My understanding of this theme has changed significantly, with time away from the thesis for a personal leave, and with reflection. Initially I was struck by the fact that every participant discussed the isolation in their work, and yet the nature of their work was to connect with another person. I was focused on the dichotomy, the seeming incongruence between the isolation they felt and the intimacy they offered. I started to see it as a scale, with isolation on one end and intimacy on the other. However, with reflection and through discussions with others I now see that the point is not that they find themselves somewhere on this continuum, it is that they actively dictate the bounds of their interactions with clients in order to maintain boundaries they are comfortable with. It is an active process rather than a passive positioning.

In the third theme, *enacting agency: "For now I will do this job because I can. Fuck it,"* I explore the decisions participants made in choosing to work and how they operated their businesses. The theme explains how participants exercised agency in making these decisions within the structural barriers that act to constrain them, and how the individual intersections of race, age, class, and social capital hinder or facilitate the options they have available.

It is important to realize that while these themes came from the data, their conceptualization was mine. The interviews are a product of our shared discussion about their photos. I did the coding and analysis myself, and I created meaning from the ideas discussed by comparing and contrasting those with the literature. I will endeavour to present the themes transparently so that readers can follow how I came to understand the

findings in this way, and so that they may also come to separate understandings, which may differ from my own.

Participants

My intent was to include a purposive sample that represented the heterogeneity (i.e., differences in gender, age, ethnicity, location of work, and types of services offered) shown in the literature, and that service agencies have identified as working in Lethbridge. I spoke to a number of outdoor and massage parlour workers who declined to participate, and unfortunately did not have any contact with male or trans workers. Successful recruitment came only from posters at a sexual health center, at an addictions clinic (where I work as a nurse), through my personal contacts, and through snowball sampling.

I completed initial interviews with nine participants. Two participants saw my poster at the sexual health center and one of those referred a friend. Three saw my poster at the addictions clinic. One of those also referred a peer, who agreed to participate. One participant I met socially. I also had one other interview with a woman who was given my number by a mutual acquaintance. Though I transcribed the interview, I chose not to include her as a participant. She was confused during the interview and repeatedly referred to me as a recruiter from an escort agency. I explained several times that I was not, and that this was a research project about individuals' experiences doing sex work; however I am not comfortable that she understood or that she was able to give informed consent. I also chose not to include one of the other participants. She had showed enthusiasm and interviewed along with her friend who was also participating. However, she did not complete the photos and I was unable to contact her regarding her wish to stay involved in the research. When I looked back at the interview transcript, the other

participant had done the majority of the speaking and there was almost nothing left to analyze from this individual's participation, so I excluded the data. In the end, seven participants were included in the study, and I have photos from six of them.

All seven participants were female, ranging in age from 20-45. Three women self-identified as Métis, the others in general as Caucasian, though they used a variety of terms. Their work includes outdoor solicitation, private escort work, escort agency work, webcam work, and in the past one of the participants did stripping and exotic dancing. Four of the women have children, though only one retains custody of her children. One gave child custody to the other parent voluntarily because of her drug use at the time (she made it clear that the decision was not related to sex work), and the other two have had their children removed by court order and placed with the other parent or other family. In one of those cases, the other parent in the custody hearing cited sex work; in the other, work was not regular and it was not brought up. Four of the women have other jobs in the service industry (retail and hospitality), and one works in retail and is a post-secondary student. For all four of these women, sex work is done to supplement their other income when it does not cover rent, grocery bills, or other expenses. That is not to say that they do this work under duress; all four work sporadically when it suits their needs.

All of the participants were enthusiastic about the project and many expressed their enjoyment or relief at being able to speak to someone about this topic. Though the first meeting was intended only to discuss the project, sign the consent form, and give the camera, this initial conversation with each participant lasted one to two hours. I did not use an interview guide for the first interview as it was not intended to be an interview and so it was completely unstructured. This participant-led discussion allowed me to add important themes to my interview guide for the second interview, and gave me time to

reflect on additional questions that I had for each person. While not exactly grounded theory, this flexibility is a strength of multiple, qualitative interviews that allows the researcher to respond to new information and modify the research design accordingly (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Table 1 includes a short biographical sketch of participants, to offer the reader some contextualization of their voices. All demographics were self-reported because I felt it was important that participants identify how they see themselves. The participants chose pseudonyms; all other information reflects participants' ages and situations at the time of the interviews, in the summer of 2015.

Table 1. *Participant Demographics*

Pseudo-nym	Gender	Age	Self-Identified Ethnicity	Type of Sex Work	Past Sex Work	Intimate Partner	Childr-en	Other Work
Andrea	Female	29	Métis	None currently	Outdoor Work (Lethbridge)	Yes	No	No
Darlene	Female	20	Caucasian	Escort agency (Lethbridge)	None	Yes	No	Retail
Isobel	Female	42	Métis	Outdoor Work (Medicine Hat, Lethbridge)	None	Yes	Yes, has custody	Hosp-itality
Jenn	Female	25	Métis	Private Escort (Lethbridge)	None	Yes	Yes, in custody of a family member	No
Nellie	Female	37	White	Private Escort (Calgary, Lethbridge)	Outdoor Work (Lethbridge)	Yes	Yes, in custody of other parent	Service
Nicole	Female	45	German Mormon	Private Escort (Lethbridge)	Outdoor Work, Stripping, Exotic Dancing (Many cities across Western Canada)	No	Yes, in custody of other parent	No
Trish	Female	29	Caucasian	Webcam work (Lethbridge)	None	Yes	No	Retail, Student

Andrea was a 29-year-old Métis woman who lived with her boyfriend. She was no longer working, but spoke about her time doing outdoor sex work. She started doing outdoor work in Lethbridge because it was a way to pay for drugs and make a lot of

money easily. She had no children and had not done any other sex work. She lived off Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) and her boyfriend's support, and was interested in starting her own business beading or selling make-up products. She continued to struggle with addiction, and used methadone as part of her drug treatment.

Darlene was a 20-year-old Caucasian woman who lived with her long-term boyfriend and roommate. She and her roommate worked at the same escort agency in Lethbridge and occasionally did calls together. She also had a full-time retail job, and was in the position to choose how often she wanted to work when the escort agency called with a client. She did sex work for the first time when her parole officer offered to set up a date for her. She was happy with her current work arrangement and planned to continue doing sex work until she was emotionally unable to.

Isobel was a 42-year-old Métis woman who lived in a hotel with her two youngest school-aged children. She had three older children who were grown and living away from home as well. She had a boyfriend who did not live with them. The children's fathers were not involved financially or otherwise in the children's lives. She worked full-time in the hospitality industry, but did occasional outdoor sex work because her job did not cover her expenses. She started doing sex work at age 13, working for a pimp, living in a house with other young girls working "the high track" that he controlled in Medicine Hat. Isobel had a significant criminal record and struggled with addiction in the past. Though she used methadone as part of her drug treatment and no longer used street drugs, she remained concerned that Child Protective Services might apprehend her children because of her past and her current sex work in Lethbridge.

Jenn was a 25-year-old Métis woman who lived with her parents and did not work regularly, but collected AISH. She struggled with attention deficit hyperactivity

disorder (ADHD) and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD), and described herself as someone who had difficulty reading people and who often was taken advantage of, especially when she did not take her medication. Her boyfriend pressured her into doing sex work for the first time. He intimidated her until she agreed to perform sexual acts with him and his friends. She had a pre-school aged child (this particular boyfriend was not the father) who was in the care of her aunt and uncle in another city. Her parents made her give up the child because of drug use, but she hoped to one day regain custody. She did occasional sex work acts in Lethbridge for money or small things she needed like cigarettes, when her AISH cheque ran out.

Nellie was a 37-year-old white woman who lived with her long-time partner. She did private escort work in Calgary and now in Lethbridge, but had also done street solicitation in the past in Calgary. She started working at 13 years of age. She had a school-aged child who was in the custody of the father. She gave up custody voluntarily because of her drug use. Nellie no longer used drugs and instead took methadone as a part of her recovery plan. She worked in the service industry off and on, and had recently started a business selling her paintings and clothes that she made. Nellie hoped to one day not need to do sex work to augment her income, though she was appreciative of the ability to do so. Following her last interview, Nellie's partner passed away from a drug overdose. She remained clean and in drug treatment.

Nicole lived alone in a basement suite and described herself as a 45-year-old German Mormon woman. She worked as a private escort in Lethbridge but had done stripping, exotic dancing, and outdoor solicitation across numerous cities in Western Canada in the past. She struggled with addiction and used sex work to support herself and pay for the drugs she used in order to not be sick. She had two teenage children in the

custody of the other parent, who cited drugs and sex work in the custody hearing. Her children were not speaking to her because their father had told them about her sex work and drug use. She started doing sex work as a teenager, and then went back to it when she had an injury that made her unable to work in her job at the time, and employment insurance (EI) did not pay enough to cover rent and groceries for herself and her children.

Trish was a 29-year-old Caucasian woman who lived with a roommate. She was a full-time student and did part-time retail work. She did webcam work in Lethbridge, which she started in university, to supplement her retail income. She was in the position to decide when and how much she would work, and periodically took breaks from webcam work when it became emotionally difficult. She had never done other sex work and did not have children.

Performing Identities: "I'm Not a Whore, I'm Not a Slut, I'm Not a Skank, I'm Just Me."

This theme looks at the multiple roles that participants held, and describes how they performed those roles. Performance in this case is repeatedly fulfilling the responsibilities and expectations of a given role. Participants were complex individuals, and they performed roles as partners, mothers, and Women. Because some of those roles may have seemed conflicting otherwise, like partner and sex worker, or mother and sex worker, participants created identities, or socially created personas as Women, which were unique to their sex work role, and separate from the identities they had in the rest of their lives. In order to move between roles, they engaged in rituals that allowed them to step out of one identity and into another.

Participants spoke about the activities they enjoyed that made them well-rounded, complex individuals with lives and interests outside sex work. Jenn talked about her artwork and her social life.

> I do it for anxiety and it really relaxes me and it helps. It's colourful and its great. It's calming. I like putting my music on and just going with the flow. I like colouring and dancing and singing, and you know, all that fun stuff. I like getting out and meeting new people (Jenn, independent escort work).

Nellie expressed passion about connectedness and the power of community. She had a YouTube channel where she talked about her ideas. She hosted a women's sharing circle in several cities in which she has lived where women could get together and share, learn, and grow as individuals and as a community. She also felt strongly about mentoring youth because she did not have anyone who showed interest or cared for her until she was 16 years old. She aspired to work with youth in some capacity in the future. In the meantime she focused on making art and clothing, and building her own business to sell them.

Figure 1. Art (Darlene, escort agency work)

Trish loved being a student and was working on ideas for an honour's thesis. She blogged and was working on expanding some of the informal counselling she did with clients in sex room chats, by offering counselling-only sessions on her webcam sites. Nellie and Darlene were both artists (Figure *1)*. Nellie made clothes as well, and Darlene enjoyed video and board games. Andrea beaded and made other artwork, and spent time with her dogs. Nellie, Trish, Darlene and Isobel all did other work or school outside of sex work.

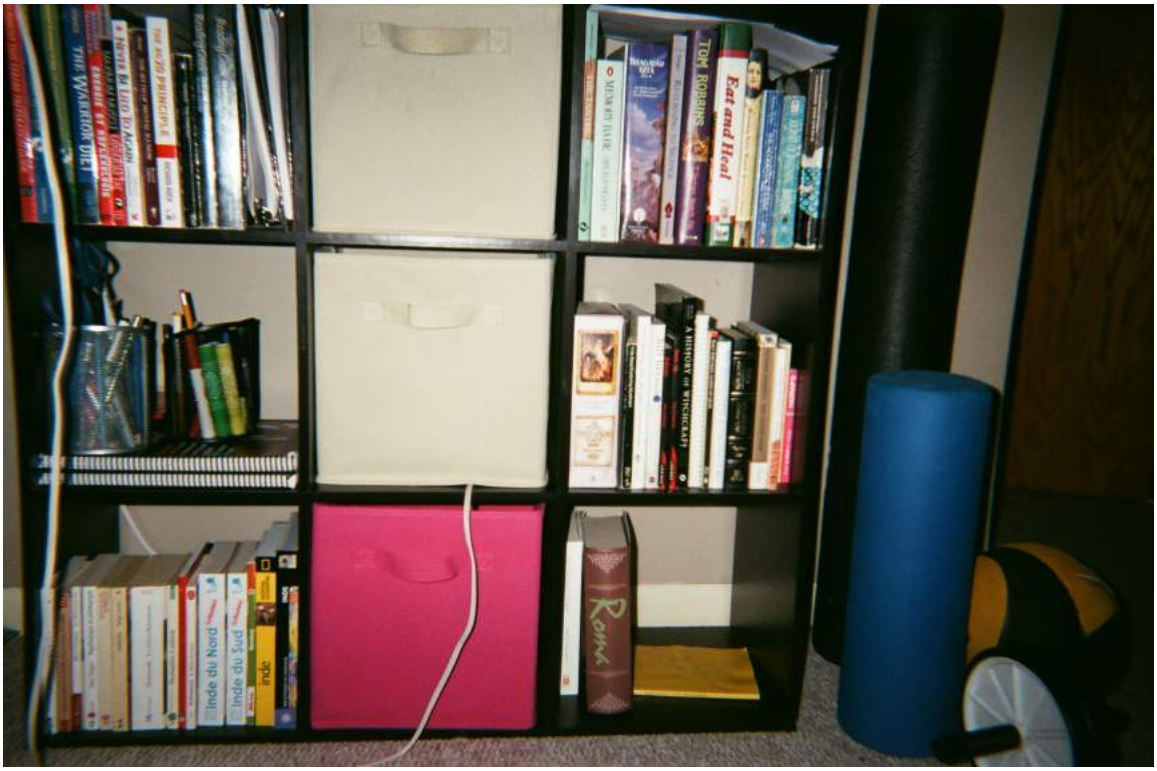

Figure 2. A fully rounded person (Nellie, independent escort work)

> I think having a hobby is like, really essential, but I think it is for all humans in general, I mean, I don't think you are a fully rounded person unless you have a hobby (Figure *2)* (Nellie, independent escort work).

It was important for participants to convey their depth as individuals. Each one made a point to highlight her individual hobbies and interests, to broaden the picture and avoid a reduction of her portrayal as simply a sex worker.

Partners and Sex Work

Five of the seven participants had intimate partners, and all of the partners were aware of the participants' work. Partners' roles for participants included support person, bodyguard, pimp, and childcare provider. Some of the partners offered a position of supportive neutrality to participants' work, while others placed pressure on participants to either start sex work, do more work, or to stop.

Jenn's boyfriend pressured her into doing sex work in the first place and acted as her pimp. He organized dates and kept a share of the profits. She did not want to do this work, but he kept her going with threats.

> Well he basically just trapped me in a room. He wouldn't let me do anything, you know and that's the whole thing behind it. And he basically just pushed me and pushed me and pushed me and I basically just did the favours he wanted me to do, selling my body and making money. He just wanted my money (Jenn, independent escort work).

She maintains that she did escort work and denies being trafficked, though the fact that he recruited her, threatened her, and used physical abuse to push her to continue to perform sexual services satisfies the United Nations definition of sex trafficking (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, n.d., p. 3).

Isobel described a partner who paid her pimp $10,000 because he did not want her to continue to do sex work. She agreed at the time and was happy to leave, but since felt conflicted about a monetary value being placed on her worth.

> It was like ten o'clock in the morning, like, "fuck, I need to go home you guys, I'm in like, big trouble."… And he's like, "please don't go Isobel, just don't go back." I'm like, "well it's just not that easy, right, I can't just say I'm not going back." And so he's like, "well tell me what I need to do and I'll do it and whatever." And he worked on the rigs and he wasn't poor and so he paid. At the time he paid 4000 bucks and then give him another $6000 a couple months later and I just never went back. I think it's like, whatever fuck. I mean, he [the pimp] could have said ten grand, twenty, I mean, just to be whatever. So yeah, and now

> I'm like, now I'm starting to be pissed. "That's all I'm worth, eight, ten days of work?" Fuck that, too cheap (Isobel, outdoor sex work).

She had since worked but not for a pimp, and was currently with a partner who supported her choice to work when and how she felt she needed to.

Nellie described her partner's conflicted feelings about her work. He told her that he did not like it and that she did not need to do it, but then when money was tight he suggested that she do a few dates. Supporting the choice to do sex work was easier for Darlene's partner. He told her that, '"if it makes you happy, fine. If it wrecks you, you're stopping.' He doesn't care what I do as long as I'm happy with what I'm doing" (Darlene, escort service work). She did admit to challenges at the beginning, however, when she was not yet aware of the need to set boundaries and openly talked to her partner about the details of her work.

> The only strain was when I first started to work and I didn't know where my boundaries were at that point. And so I talked about my work, and that put a strain between us because he doesn't want to hear who I sleep with, really. And so I don't talk about my work, I don't talk about who I slept with or where I've been or blah, blah, blah. If I've had a bad day, I go to talk to [friend who also does sex work].… I don't talk to him about my work. I tell him I've had a bad day and just want cuddles and I cry (Darlene, escort agency work).

Nellie, however, discussed the importance of having her partner to talk to. She did not have other close friends or family, and though he was resistant to the idea at first, in the end he acquiesced because she needed someone in whom to confide. She admitted that he did not like to hear about it, but was supportive, and for her, the ability to confide in him and release her emotions was crucial to her wellbeing.

Beyond someone to listen, Nellie described her partner as protective, and she used his instincts when her own were unreliable.

> 'Cause he's way more aware of things than me most of the time, he's way smarter than me. Way smarter than me. I have horrible instincts. When you're raised by a

> pedophile-alcoholic, what you perceive as good is all the bad stuff. So when you run into people that are bad, you feel it's good. But your entire life, all the bad people, you think are good. You have no choice. It's in you. You see them like, "oh dad." You have that thing in your head, and you loved your dad, it doesn't matter what he did to you, you loved him. So my whole life I've thought I've got with the worst people because I don't see anything wrong with them (Nellie, private escort work).

Participants' roles as partners and Women were intertwined. Their decisions to start, stop, or continue sex work were often influenced by their partners, and their work also affected their relationships.

Mothering and Sex Work

Of the four participants in this research who had children, only Isobel had children in her custody. Nicole's children were removed because of her sex work and use of drugs. The children's father assumed custody and would allow no contact. Jenn's child was removed because of drug use, mental health problems, and FASD. Nellie chose to give up custody to the father because she felt the child would be better off with him, but she emphasized that the decision was about the addiction with which she struggled, not sex work. This was a difficult conversation topic for the three who did not have their children with them. Nicole expressed relief that this research project was being done because she felt her ex-partner was poisoning her children's minds about how she supported herself and what that meant about her as a person. She noted that he called her a "cheap whore" and she worried that her children would carry that image of their mother without seeing the woman separate from the work. She felt strongly that sex work did not define her as a person, and certainly not as a mother.

Jenn had different feelings about the work she sometimes did. For her it was more of a vice, something she tried to avoid but sometimes was not able to, and felt regret

whenever she did a date. She expressed concern that her daughter would one day engage in sex work like she did.

> And I don't need my daughter to turn out like me. And that's what my mom was saying to me yesterday, "oh ya well what if [daughter] does that?" And I'm like, "no, she won't" … That's what I mean, I don't know why my parents would think my daughter is going to take after me but she won't. She's gonna do good (Jenn, independent escort work).

Jenn talked about putting her life back together and rebuilding herself so that one day she could get her daughter back again.

> And that's the thing that really makes me mad when my own family considers me that [a whore] but I'm not. And that's the stupid part, I hate it, it sucks. I don't know why I did it [sex work]. I just did it for him to be happy, more so. I didn't even do it for me. I did it for him. And now that I've come across that point I'm not crossing any more boundaries. I'm just keeping to myself. I got pictures of my daughter on my phone but that doesn't make me feel any better when I see other people with my kid. I don't want them to take her fully away. I don't need no people calling me down and looking down on me, 'cuz I know I'm a good person. I've fought my way through it and I'm going to get her back (Jenn, independent escort work).

For her, being a good mother was incompatible with doing sex work, so she tried to avoid sex work and rebuild herself so that she could regain custody of her daughter.

Isobel was the only participant who had custody of her children at the time of the interview. She talked about the stress of watching her grown children, who were mostly raised by her mother while she was in jail, all become involved in drugs and crime. She talked about the difficulties of raising her younger ones now, while she mostly tried to stay out of sex work, but struggled to pay rent and parent alone. She reflected that the chaos of her childhood led to the chaos of her adulthood, and that the same cycle is continuing in her older children.

> I said this to my mom, really what could I expect for my kids and their lifestyle. How they grew up, right? I mean, their parents were both addicts, were both in and out of jail. The kids were still little. And then after I got out of jail then I went on the run in [Saskatchewan city]. And I dragged my kids there and I lived with

> this big dope dealer. And pretty soon [son] selling coke at 11 and taking Ativans [an anti-anxiety drug that is also commonly sold on the street] to school and pretty soon, you know? So I took them out of one chaotic situation and put them into another on a bigger scale, right? And I mean, no wonder why they behave the way they do … I grew up in an alcoholic home and it was just the norm, right? That was the norm for me. My mom got beat up and I got woke up late for school 'cause she felt like shit. And I'd go to school and that's what I'd think about all day so I'd skip out of school. So I guess it was always there, just in different forms (Isobel, outdoor work).

She described her life as 'the storm before the storm,' a series of chaotic events developing into greater chaos (Figure *3)*.

Figure 3. The storm before the storm (Isobel, outdoor work)

Isobel worried about the younger children growing up in that chaos, and worked hard to give them some form of normalcy. She described her younger children as her purpose, and saw a second chance to be the mother she wanted to be with them (Figure 4).

> When we lived in Medicine Hat we had a set schedule. Mondays we were at the library, Tuesdays we were at the swimming pool, Wednesdays we were at the park, Thursdays we were this. We did something everyday without fail, right? Plus we had two dogs that needed to be outside and exercised every day, and of

> course it was summer. Well now it's winter. I hate the fucking cold, I don't like nothing in the cold. We're in a new city, we're more broke than we ever have been before. So all these contributing factors lead us to really not doing too much … But I'm still reading books, I'm still watching movies. We're still colouring, we're still counting, we're still—we just do more of it at home. They're really my purpose that I get up everyday and they're really, even though I went up against everything I swore I was never gonna do again I got them out of the deal. My life probably wouldn't be what it is now (Isobel, outdoor work).

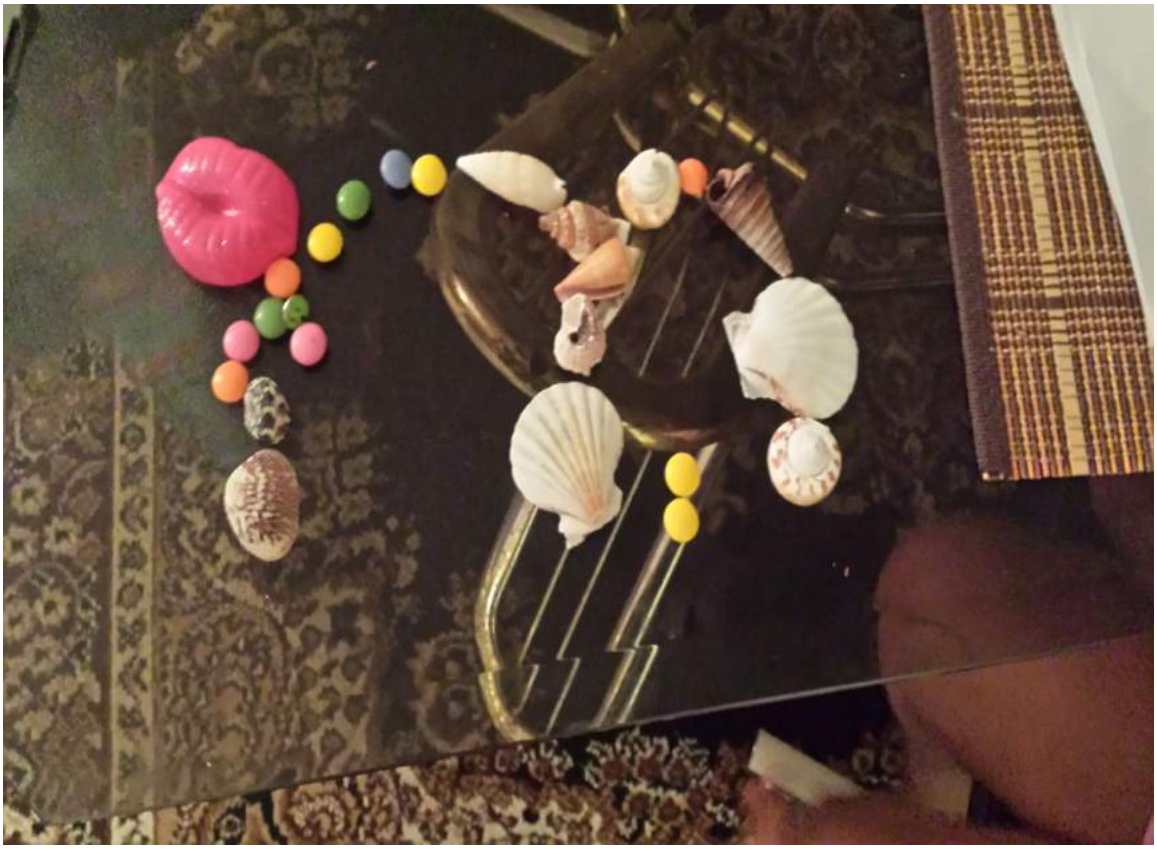

Figure 4. Collections from my kids (Isobel, outdoor work)

For some participants, motherhood was broader than raising their biological children. Nicole had been homeless as a youth so she took in "street kids" and gave them a meal, a shower, and a clean set of clothes. She said that many of them call her "mother," and she felt a sense of responsibility to help those young people who needed it. She often mentored new working girls as well. She showed them how to work safely and told them about logistics, prices, social services, and anything else they might need. Isobel

also took in those who had no other place to go. She had a constant stream of extended family and friends staying with her. She helped them in any way she could, sometimes helping those who did sex work to do it more safely by offering a room where they could bring dates.

Nellie spoke little about her son except to say that she gave up custody to his father because of her drug use. However, she did speak about her relationship with her own mother when she was young. She wished her mother had been more of a mother to her, and stopped her from doing sex work.

> It would be something like, "oh well, you know, escort's the oldest thing on the planet, and it's fine if you do that, like of course it's fine." And I don't want her to say that. I don't want her to say, I want her to say, "I'll help you go to school, I'll help you do something different, because I'm your mom and that's what moms do." Because that's what I would do for my son. But she's not gonna. She's not gonna help me beyond herself, she can't help herself, so, whatever (Nellie, independent escort work).

Motherhood roles are impacted in a big way by sex work. Some participants spoke of doing sex work specifically so they could support their children; in other instances it was the reason their children were removed from their custody, or the source of ongoing fear of the same. Participants who were able to spend time with their children spoke of the joy those interactions brought to their lives and the pride it gave them to watch their children grow and be part of their lives. For some participants motherhood expanded beyond their biological children and included helping others who needed a place to stay or a meal, and even mentoring those new to sex work.

Identity as a Sex Worker

Participants identified many assets that helped them in their work or made them better at it, including being pretty, physically fit, street-smart, technology-savvy, perceptive, having strong listening skills, and good karma. Participants incorporated those

personal strengths into their sex work identities to help them attract and retain clients, earn more money, and work more efficiently.

Trish spoke about how allowing herself to be authentic worked as an asset for her in her work. She felt clients appreciated her ability to be real.

> I have had that comment said to me multiple times, that they enjoy that, that they're like, "oh you're like the girl next door but naughty." You know? "This is awesome."… I think it's healthier and I wanna project that image of authenticity, and then, you know, even as a sex worker or a model or someone that you know, people are looking at their physical beauty as at least part of the job, it's important to project an image of, "it's okay to be imperfect, it's okay to like, you know, have a pimple [laughs] or like, you know, not have an insane amount of makeup on that day or, like you know, any of that stuff" (Trish, webcam work).

Furthermore, when she was working, Trish felt uninhibited by the usual social conventions because clients can move freely in and out of chat rooms, and the sheer volume of clients made her content to wait for someone who was genuinely interested in being in hers. Her sex work identity was free then to be more of her idealized self than she allowed in her life outside her work where it mattered to her to impress others or live up to their expectations.

> I feel way more free to just like, completely let it all out there. Yeah. And like, just not care. Sometimes I feel like this is kind of my idealized self, like I'll be much more sort of bold and open and strong and like, assertive than I can find myself in other areas of my life … It's funny though, because I feel like almost this one is more genuine and real because I like, give way less of a fuck what they think. You know? Versus the people I interact with like my professors or my boss and all that. Whereas when I'm online in a chatroom I don't care if someone comes in and doesn't like me (Trish, webcam work).

Listening skills were another strength participants identified, which helped them to connect with clients on a deeper level. Several participants mentioned that sometimes that is mainly what the client is looking for, just to be heard and listened to, or to ask advice about relationships, sex, kids, work, or other areas of their lives. Some of the participants prided themselves on their ability to provide that for their clients, and felt that

some clients returned and became regulars because of this. Trish described aspirations to expand her webcam persona and offer counselling-only sessions because that has become a big part of her job and was an area where she felt she excels.

One of the strengths that participants identified was the ability to build strength from the adversity they face in their work. Nicole, Nellie and Isobel felt that in decades of working the streets they have developed the wisdom to understand clients, police, prison, and the courts, and how to safely and effectively navigate "the system." Nellie attributed her strength in doing sex work to the abuse she suffered as a child. That experience gave her the ability to compartmentalize sex and to not feel or get hurt when others might. "You can't break what's already broken" (Nellie, independent escort work). She felt that the strength and skills she gained as a survivor of sexual abuse allowed her to engage in sex work without succumbing to burnout related to connecting with people on such an intimate level. Her brokenness was her strength, in that she was able to engage in sex dispassionately and without feeling the connection, which allowed her important distance for emotional protection.

Perceiving body and self: "Vaginas are really temperamental!" Participants discussed what they see as their physical assets or "flaws," and the impact those have on their self-perception and thus on their identities.

Figure 5. I am strong (Nellie, independent escort work)

Nicole was proud of her body and how she looked, and bragged that she advertised that she was substantially younger than she really was. Nellie had more complicated feelings about her body. She exercised and lifted weights in order to maintain a weight that she was happy with and to compete with younger girls (Figure 5).

> [I]t does get me down though, because you see the girls on Backpage that are twenty and they are twenty-five or even thirty, they're in really good shape and really thin and it, uh, it's really hard to see. You know? And how much pressure I have to put on myself to be different than I would be naturally. Like, I like who I am, and I'm OK with it, but I do try to be something for them (Nellie, independent escort).

Figure 6. Scale (Nellie, independent escort work)

On the other hand, she also described the weight that she struggles with as an attribute in her work, and how, in the end she tried to make peace with it all (Figure 6*)*.

> 'Cause guys will always want something different, there's, you'll always find a guy that wants that type of girl, always, always. That's why I don't worry too much either, because guys want my booty, they want that big booty, that's like, if they wanted a small girl they'll wait for the small girl, that's just how it is so, I don't stress too much (Nellie, independent escort).

In discussing her work doing exotic dancing, Nicole described the high that came from being physically desired, and how that desirability countered a previously negative self-image.

> And I went from failing gym to being able to do a push up against the pole, and dropping down into ten. Like, I'd do a handstand and drop down and do ten push ups and drop into the splits. And yet I failed gym. Ya, $1000-$1500 a week is more of a motivator than an A+. And I went from being told I was ugly and nasty and stupid from my mom and my siblings to, "fuck they [the audience] are doing the wave." This is a power trip (Nicole, independent escort work, speaking about previous work dancing in clubs).

Trish described how her body image was even more specifically tied to her vagina, which was problematic for her.

> I've definitely had times where yeah, I feel like my, my ability to work and make money and kind of as a result, my self-worth can be really tied to how my vagina is feeling, and that can be really frustrating, because, like, I find vaginas are really temperamental! Right, they're like fucking super delicate like, it's really easy to throw off the pH balance or just like, have a shitty time where you're like, I don't want to play with myself let alone put it like right in someone's face on camera where they can see everything. And that's like, you know, or even just having a pimple on your butt or something, like, yeah like, all of that that and then I can always see myself, so yeah like if I have a blemish or something like that, it might be enough sometimes, to make it so that I don't cam that day, because it's just gonna kill my confidence like, I'm gonna be staring at that all day, and I mean, I think for the most part, customers don't really care about that kind of stuff, but, but I mean I do. I can notice it, so it can throw me off. And uh, yes, sometimes I really hate that, I'll need to make money, and then like, "fucking vagina, just like not working today, and so now I don't get to make the money that I wanted to. God damn it." But it's out of my control, there's only so much I can do (Trish, webcam work).

Trish's ability to work was tied to this body part over which she felt little control. Even her self-worth hinged on how her body appeared and was able to perform under close scrutiny. Her ability to succeed at her job was associated with her ability to pull together her own body image and sell that in an engaging and captivating way, and that was not something she felt able to do all the time.

> It's a job just like any other job, sometimes you don't wanna do it, but this type of work you have to be like sexy and, and happy and like, engaging. You have a camera on you the whole time, you can't just sit there and be like "I feel like shit today." You're not gonna make any money. It's all commission based too, it's not like I'm guaranteed an hourly wage while I'm sitting there. I have to entice people to want to spend that money, so I have to, you know, feel in a good mood, and sometimes that's not the case (Trish, webcam work).

However, when she was able to pull all of those things together, Trish felt she had greater freedom to be her idealized self than when she was not working.

> It's actually been a lot of freedom to have that online identity, because, in a lot of ways, when I've been on cam, I've felt like, more myself than anywhere else,

> because like, I don't have those people sitting there in front of me, so it's a lot easier to just let things roll off my back, or just to be like "I don't give a shit what you think" … And I've definitely had moments in my life where I've realised like, I wanna emulate my cam persona more, 'cause I do feel like that's more me, I just kind of am a little more boxed and constrained out off-camera or wherever right, 'cause I have to, you know, work within society's guidelines and bla bla bla (Trish, webcam work).

Jenn focused on how her mental health impacted her self-perception. She described herself as a positive person and felt that despite her struggles with depression and the difficulties she had faced, she was proud of her resilience and saw herself as happy and powerful as well. In Figure 7 the dark water represented the depressed part of herself, which was smaller in comparison to the bright, cheerful blue of the sky, which she saw as more powerful than the water.

> It has been a rocky road for me and I've been up and down and all over, and this picture just brings a smile to my face. I'm proud of myself. Like what I mean by murky [water], it would be more of a depression type of thing. But I look at the sky, it just brings a smile to my face. This is my happiness right here (Jenn, independent escort work).

Figure 7. This is my happiness, right here (Jenn, independent escort work)

Some of what participants incorporated into their sex work identities came from outside sources. Trish discussed the stigma that she faced as a Woman, both from society and from herself. She was aware that her own views were a result of what she had internalized from those around her and the way she felt society views Women. She found it complicated to separate her own feelings from what she felt society imposed on her as a sex worker, even to the point of not feeling legitimate enough as a Woman because she did not identify with what she felt society says a Woman is—an immoral slut and home wrecker (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Sex workers versus society (Trish, webcam work)

Her photo reveals her own ideas about what a sex worker is—hidden, ashamed and having poor social support—yet these do not fit with her own self-image, so that incongruence also separated her from other Women. She recognized her own privilege and the fact that it allowed her to choose a safer, less stigmatized, and more privileged type of sex work, but also that it further alienated her from other Women (Figure 9). This incongruence reveals the inapplicability of generic social constructions to all Women. It also reveals the complex emotional and psychological work that Women engage in when they think about themselves and what they do.

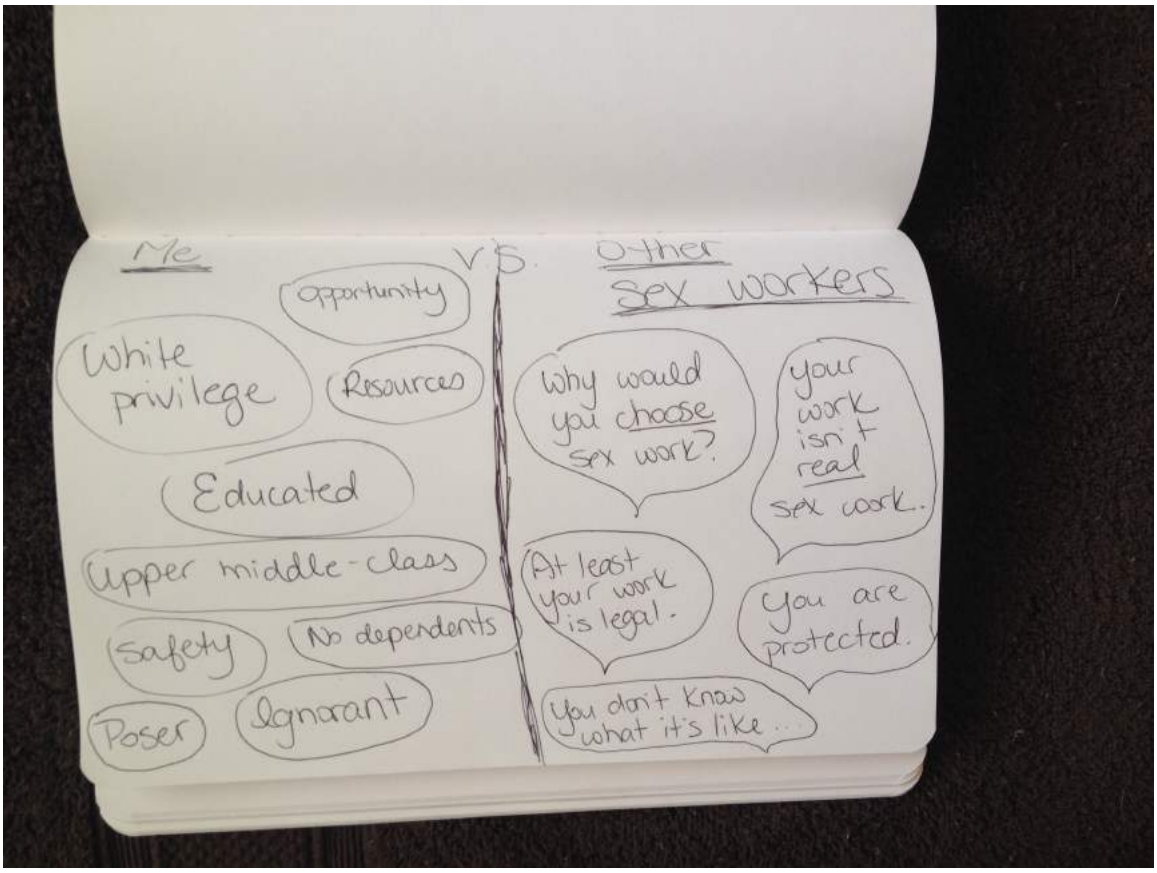

Figure 9. Me versus other sex workers (Trish, webcam work)

Despite the stigma that she felt from society and herself, Trish continued to defend her choice to do sex work. “How can this be bad? I’m helping people have orgasms, I’m spreading happiness” (Trish, webcam work).

Influence for participants’ sex work identities came from society as well as the people in their private lives. Participants leveraged their individual skills and assets in order to excel at their job, and built sex work identities that in some cases gave them greater freedom and strength in their work identities than they had in their other identities at home. However, their sex work identities remained stigmatized, and participants had to reconcile how these fit with their other identities.

Moving Between Identities

Participants described various roles they play, and the unique identities they have for each of the roles they perform. Most voiced the need to separate their work identities from the rest of their lives to protect their relationships or their children, and to protect themselves from the emotional engagement with clients. They accomplished these goals by using a different name, showering, wearing a condom with clients but not with partners, and donning a work identity that is vastly different than their identity at home.

Trish spoke about the ritual in which she engages to move from her home self to her work self and back again. She has certain clothes that are only for work, so she dresses and prepares her bedroom (from which she also works) in a certain way. When she is finished, she reverses the ritual as part of returning to her home self and restoring her bedroom to its home state (Figures 10 and 11).

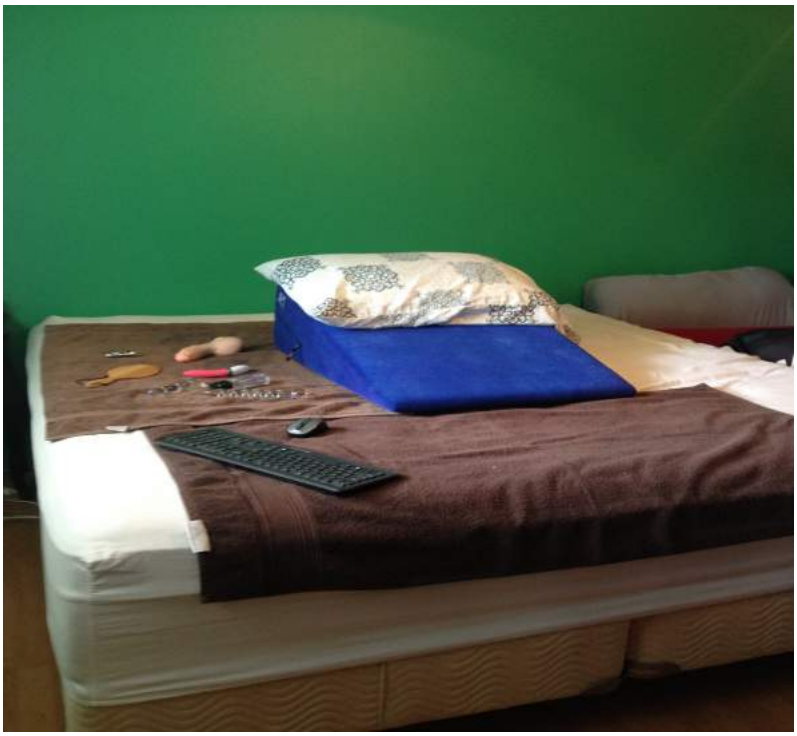

Figure 10. My office (Trish, webcam work)

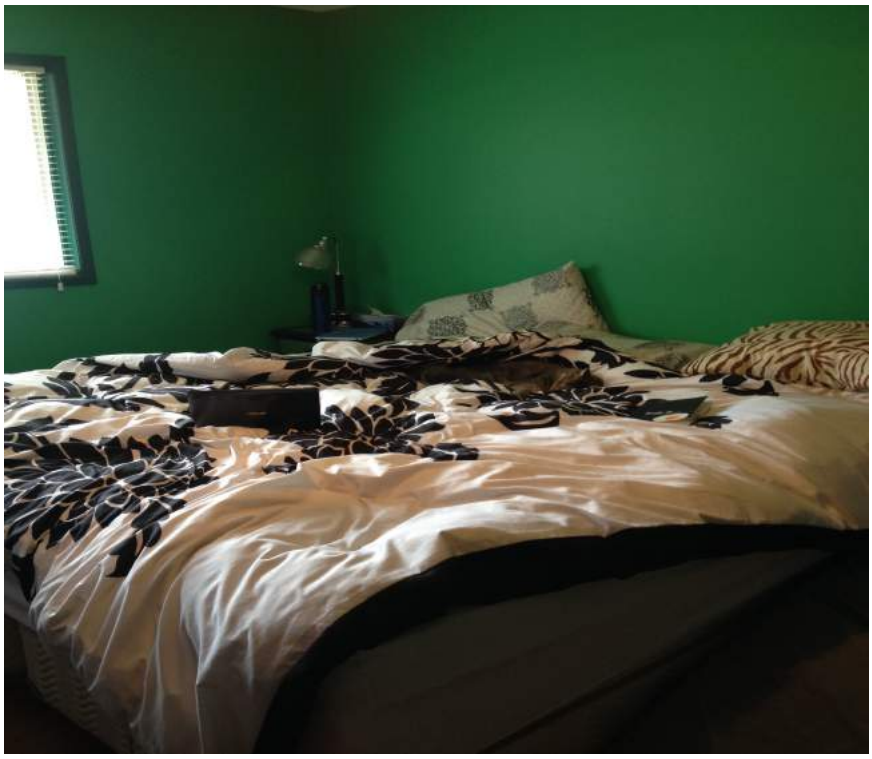

Figure 11. My bedroom (Trish, webcam work)

Participants' roles as Women require different identities, and so they create identities specific to the performance of that role. These roles are not always seen as compatible with their other roles as mothers and partners, so the separate identity allows them to perform each role independently, using ritual to move between each. This theme, *performing identities,* describes how participants create a separate sex work identity, and manage it along with their identities for the other roles they perform.

Boundaries Control Intimacy: You Actually Have to Physically and Emotionally Attach Yourself to a Human and then Detach Yourself Immediately After"

This theme explains how participants protected themselves emotionally from the intimacy that is demanded by their work. Some participants avoided intimacy with clients almost completely by using drugs or alcohol, or mentally disengaging from the act.

Others allowed a certain level of intimacy, but kept it bounded according to their comfort level. They connected with clients and then disconnected immediately afterward, and used their sex work identities to employ acting, in order to perform the role expected of them. The separation that resulted as participants navigated the tensions in these unique spaces of life ensured emotional safety, but it also resulted in isolation. Participants felt their roles as Women were characterized by isolation, so they employed techniques to facilitate grounding in order to restore balance and wellness, and to reconnect with their home identities, and with others in their lives.

Setting Boundaries

The commodity offered by Women is some level of intimacy; however, it generally does not involve a completely mutual exchange of uncensored emotional connection. The term itself carries different meaning for different people, and participants had unique rules as to what they considered too intimate to share with a client. For example, some considered kissing too intimate and reserved that for private encounters; others questioned how one could have sex without kissing. Most participants used a pseudonym while working, both to protect their own privacy and to provide emotional distance, maintaining separation between their work identity and their private identity. Most participants used condoms with clients, but those who had partners did not with their partners. Condoms provided a physical barrier with clients, and represented a boundary between sex for work (condom) and sex with a partner (no condom). Participants made decisions about the level of intimacy they allowed with their clients, and set boundaries according to their comfort level. They explained the importance of maintaining separation and controlling intimacy in maintaining wellness.

Trish maintained emotional boundaries with clients in the way she engaged with them. Her chatroom settings were such that the client could see and hear her, but could only type in return; she could not see or hear them. She understood the importance of this precaution for her, because it allowed her to engage with them without the possibility of being turned off by something the client did or how he looked. If she allowed video or microphone she would run the risk of a situation where she felt unable to connect with a client and therefore perform for him.

Nellie described how she retained power on a date, subtly manoeuvring a situation to stay within her boundaries.

> You have to have massage oil, 'cuz during an hour visit I will take as long as I can doing anything that's not sexual. So if I can give a really good back massage and then like, for fifteen minutes or longer do their legs or whatever, and then do body slide and just take as much time as I can (Nellie, independent escort work).

Darlene also noted the importance of emotional boundaries in her work, though sometimes she felt torn when she felt a greater connection with a client.

> You know 'cuz you meet a lot of people that you're like, you know, "I wish I could do more to help you and just be a better friend to you", but because of your career you have these limitations and you cannot connect with them past your work (Darlene, escort agency work).

Tools for Controlling Intimacy

Some participants avoided intimacy almost entirely in their interactions with clients and kept their exchanges purely physical. Isobel admitted that she was unable to work sober, and used drugs to separate her mind from what she was doing, "because it's just so easy to numb out … and to cope emotionally and mentally" (Isobel, outdoor work). Though Andrea's drug use started before her sex work, she also used drugs to cope with the work, and quit doing sex work once she stopped using drugs. Jenn and

Nicole did not say they were unable to work sober, but both used drugs while working, maintaining separation between the clients and themselves.

Isobel described another strategy to avoid intimacy with clients. She had a mental space to which she retreated, a long-standing fantasy that included a cave that was safe and warm. Inside it was homey and bright, comfortable with a mattress and pillows on the floor and pictures on the walls (Figure 12). When she was in a position where she felt uncomfortable, such as in an interaction with a client, she avoided intimacy by using alcohol and drugs, and by retreating to her cave until the date was over.

> Inside of the cave, where I would crawl, there'd be a mattress and, not rocks and dirt and ugliness, it would be a lamp and air and a mattress on the floor [laughs], you know? So as crazy as that sounds or as simple as that sounds, that's it … And sometimes I'd, you know the longer it was, I put pictures on the wall. It's weird how to that place you can actually go. 'Cause some days I would just go there and it would be done and I'd be like, "okay I didn't even get to climb up the wall yet 'cause we were done," right? But some days I could lay on the couch or on the bed and just look around and think, "Oh I wanna take that picture down and put that one there." I don't know if it was the time that kept me there, or what was going on that kept me there longer, more in depth, deep. I don't know (Isobel, outdoor work).

Figure 12. A safe space (Isobel, outdoor work)

Other participants allowed some level of intimacy with their clients. Darlene talked about the skill of connecting to a client and then subsequently disconnecting, something she saw as necessary to doing sex work. The first gives her clients the experience they are looking for, an intimate attachment to another person, the second protects Darlene emotionally from the vulnerability and emotional fatigue that can come with intimacy and energy exchange. She cautioned against engaging in sex work without a full understanding of that process, as she saw danger and burnout in the inability to handle the emotion work involved.

> It takes a certain type of person to be able to handle this type of work. Not a lot of people understand that. It's kind of like being a counsellor but more intimate. You actually have to physically and emotionally attach yourself to a human and then detach yourself immediately after. It's very trying and physically and emotionally exhausting. So if you're incapable of handling any of those things, it's not a career you should take. Less people know that. More people should (Darlene, escort agency work).

She also described how she would recognize if she needed to stop working because she was unable to handle the emotional connecting and then disconnecting.

> If I go too deep or just can't handle it anymore and there's no point carrying on. It's a very addictive job. There's lots of money that comes with my work and there's a lot of emotional detachment that needs to come with my job. So if my emotional attachment comes too far and I start detaching myself from home, I need to quit. And if the money gets too good and I feel like I'm over my head, I need to stop (Darlene, escort agency work).

Darlene explained the importance of that intimate connection with clients in her work, and how sometimes the intimacy is the primary reason they call, even above sex.

> I get a lot of clients that don't actually sleep with me, they just want my company … well cuz a lot of my clients are fairly older gentlemen so they don't get the company they need. The first time I see a client it's usually to have sex but I've had a few times that they just call me over, I go and I watch a movie with them and we have conversations about how their day went, how their kids are doing, and like, what's going wrong, you know, kind of a counsellor but more of a friend. So they're kind of paying for my friendship, which I feel bad for, but at the same time I'm like, I appreciate that they call me for that. I'm taking their money to be a

> friend and I feel like I shouldn't have to be a friend at a cost, if that makes sense,… but I genuinely mean everything I say. I'm a very blunt person and I think that's something that's missing in a lot of people, so I try to do that,… to see if I can make it [their day] better (Darlene, escort agency work).

She admits that the intimacy she allows with clients can be problematic for her in that she feels the exchange of money for intimacy makes the interaction less authentic, but she emphasizes her sincerity within those interactions.

Acting. In order to control the amount of intimacy they allowed with clients, some participants used acting, employing their sex work identities, to separate their role as a Woman from their roles and therefore emotions outside their work. Trish, Nellie, Nicole, and Darlene described the performance of their sex work identities as specific to embody clients' fantasies. Nellie and Darlene play more shy and coy identities than they otherwise are, whereas Trish is more direct and sassy than she otherwise feels able to be, and Nicole plays a distinctly dominating role, which is unique to her sex work identity. They utilized their identities strategically to capitalize on their clients' fantasies, while also remaining separate and therefore emotionally safer than if they were not utilizing a separate identity and acting.

Trish found the performance of her sex work identity liberating. The complete vulnerability of being naked on camera in a role as stigmatized as sex work freed her to explore her sex work identity in any way she liked, because she could not possibly become more vulnerable.

> [O]nce you're here already performing as a sex worker basically, like what more can I say or do that would like, make me kind of more vulnerable or more judged, so there's kind of some freedom when I'm playing this role. I'm already doing this, like, what more can I do (Trish, webcam work)?

Not all participants who employed acting found it a completely positive experience. Though she felt playing her sex work identity was freeing, and referred to

acting as important for her emotional safety, Trish also found it to be a troubling aspect of her work. She considered herself a genuine person, so the notion that she was acting in order to protect her own emotions was distressing for her. In order to reconcile the disconnect, she employed a technique Hochschild (1979) termed deep acting. This refers to an individual consciously evoking genuine emotions and reactions that are appropriate to a situation, instead of pretending to feel them. By controlling her emotions and consciously causing herself to feel a certain way, Trish's client experienced a more authentic intimacy, but Trish retained some emotional separation and therefore protection.

> I've actually struggled with that a few times because I really like to be genuine. Like I'm a genuine person, and I do care about all of my clients—anyone that I run into. I know there's a person on the other side of that computer screen, right? And so I don't like acting, but I do need to do a certain level of acting sometimes. And I don't think that's a bad thing. But I kinda had trouble reconciling that a little bit, especially because I'm not seeing them, but I'm still being sexual with them, and like, being intimate with them. So, I don't like to have it be all fake like, I just, I think it's more, I don't know. It's important to me at least anyway, to try and be genuine. And I've struggled with those boundaries actually quite a bit, especially 'cause I wanna make sure I'm protecting myself and, you know, being safe (Trish, webcam work).

Nellie expressed guilt that she had to lie to clients in order to maintain professional boundaries. She also understood the necessity of it for her own wellbeing, but resented having to do it. She showed strong emotion about having to employ this skill, in which she excelled, but did not want to have to use because it went against the attributes on which she prided herself in her life outside of work. It represented a conflict between the person she was at work, and the person she saw herself to be outside of work.

> Because I am lying through my teeth to these guys. It is really hard to pretend to like people when you're a really honest and caring kind of person. And then your whole profession is based on lies and you're so good at it. It breaks my heart that I'm so good at it that these people really genuinely think I care about them. They think that, you know, if they're gone and they never come back that I'll miss them.… So yeah, I do not want to be in the job. Not because the job's horrible or

> anything, but because of the lies. It's a straight up manipulation. And I'm not that type of person (Nellie, independent escort work).

Isolation

The tools that participants used to control intimacy with clients served to protect them from the emotional burden of connecting with clients on an intimate level. The result of that separation though, along with the stigma that sex work carries, was isolation. Participants characterized their work as lonely and isolating, despite the nature of the job—to service clients in the middle of a city. Every single participant made mention of this during their interviews. There was a separation between them and the rest of the community. "No matter how many people you're around, you're really just out there by yourself at the end of the day" (Figure 13) (Isobel, outdoor work).

Figure 13. Lone wolf (Isobel, outdoor work)

Trish talked about how alone she felt doing webcam modeling because she had not told people in her personal life, and did not know anybody in the webcam world. She explained that she had tried to speak to her aunt about it once, but it ended so badly that

she felt unable allow herself to be that vulnerable again by telling anyone else in her family. She chose her aunt as a first contact because they had always been close and she felt that she could confide in her. She started with a partial truth by telling her aunt that she had been doing some risqué modelling online. Her aunt was suspicious and upset, and immediately started demanding answers as to how much clothing she was wearing. They have spoken little since, and the once close relationship is no longer. Trish shut down after that encounter and chose not to reveal the whole truth to her aunt or open herself up to anyone else in her family (Figure 14).

Figure 14. Silence (Trish, webcam work)

When one of the other workers started a model-only chat room for those who worked on the site to connect with each other, Trish was excited and relieved at the prospect of having someone to talk to who understood, because she recognized the importance of such a connection for her wellbeing.

> I was just so excited that I had some other women to talk to that knew. The very first thing I did was post a topic like, "Who do you tell? Who do you guys share in your life that you do this?" 'Cause this has been a struggle for me right from the beginning.… It made all the difference in my world doing this work to be able to connect with other models and just like, really not feel alone. 'Cause it can be so isolating. I don't know anyone else in my real life that does sex work at all. You know? And so, getting to connect with other women who were doing this same thing, and struggling, from the mundane to the crazy, you know, just like, struggling with how to schedule, and when to go online, and struggling with the fact that you're basically self-employed, but you do need to make money. There's all those sort of mundane aspects of it. And then also just like the other totally crazy aspects, where you get people asking you the most crazy questions and you're like, "oh my god, I can't believe that someone asked me to do this" (Trish, webcam work).

Darlene talked about the importance of having someone to debrief with after a difficult day at work, particularly someone else who also did sex work and therefore understood what it was like. She suggested a service or website that could help connect people who did not have someone.

> Sometimes the girls need to talk to other girls about things. If I didn't have [friend who does sex work] here I wouldn't have anybody to talk to. And that can put a lot of emotional strain on me or her. Honestly, you just need a good friend. If you don't have a good friend, I don't know what to tell you. Make some. Go talk to the other girls. Make friends. Some sort of like, "Hookers Connect" (Darlene, escort agency work).

Participants that had worked in other cities did not discuss the isolation as being more or less prominent in Lethbridge. It is possible that with less of an established stroll, that outdoor workers experienced more isolation in Lethbridge than larger centres with an established stroll and more frequented drop in centres. However, isolation is prominent in

sex work literature, and those who do private escort or agency work generally work alone anyway, regardless of location.

Wellness Practices to Restore Balance

Wellness for participants in this research included processes to restore balance from emotional engagement with clients, the isolation they experience in their sex work roles, and the emotional toll of juggling their different identities. This balance helps to ensure ongoing emotional harmony, and helps them reengage with their home identities and with others in their lives after the separation they maintain with their work. Wellness strategies that participants identified included creative pursuits such as painting, drawing, writing, and making goods; diversions such as cooking, shopping, walking, and exercising; as well as mindfulness pursuits like spirituality, taking time alone, and spending time with a pet or someone close to them.

All of the participants spoke in some way about how they keep themselves well. Isobel took a photo to show the need for wellness in her work. She described:

> the dirty old streets. There's no clean to it, there's no fresh to it, there's no—it's like you're just stuck and it's like, the end of the block is right there, you know, and that's all it is.… And just the smell, right? Like when you're on a city street and like it smells like whatever pollution or shit,… urine, some kinds of sweat. And when you're meshed in the city life, you just—I think of cement, just cement and yuk smells (Isobel, outdoor work).

This photo is a juxtaposition of that lifestyle for her. It is "Freedom and the smell of green." (Figure 15).

Figure 15. Freedom and the smell of green (Isobel, outdoor work)

Darlene explained the need for wellness strategies.

> You need a means to calm yourself, or someone or something to ground yourself.… A lot of people get into this work because of emotional problems, and they're just trying to fill the gap, and that can lead to even more emotional damage, and sometimes even physical damage (Darlene, escort agency work).

For Nellie, wellness was about distraction from the waiting.

> You're gonna go crazy. What are you going to do, sit around and wait for the phone to ring? Like you're gonna just be waiting, going, "Why am I not getting money right now," you know? Especially as an addict, because you want drugs. It really helped me as an artist with an addiction to be able to paint and just go, "I can do this, I can wait" (Nellie, independent escort work).

Darlene described how she maintained wellness in her own life (Figure 16).

> I paint, I draw, I play cards, I play magic or Pokémon. And I have my husband and my crazy dog. These are all the things that ground me. They are the things that make me come back to earth and help me shed off all the extra weight that I don't need. 'Cause if I didn't have these things I would probably go fuckin' nuts (Darlene, escort agency work).

Figure 16. Grounding (Darlene, escort agency work)

This theme described how participants controlled intimacy in their interactions with clients, and how they sought grounding from the intimacy they did allow, and from the emotional separation they maintained with their sex work identities. Some participants avoided intimacy almost entirely through substance use and mental disengagement; others utilized sex work identities to connect with clients, and acting to allow some level of intimacy, while separating their non-sex work roles and thus protecting themselves emotionally. They dealt with the emotional burden of their work and the isolation that seemed inherent to it by engaging in practices to ground themselves and restore wellness.

Enacting Agency: "For Now I Will Do This Job Because I Can. Fuck It"

Social structures were defined in Chapter One as institutions or social constructs that create and perpetuate power dynamics (Choby & Clark, 2014). Participants talked about social structures like the criminal justice, child welfare, and social service systems, as well as stigma and violence that acted as constraining forces on their lives. These structures impacted each in different ways depending on the various characteristics related to age, class, and the amount of social capital each possessed. However, despite the restrictive influences of these structures, participants chose to tell their stories from an agency perspective. All of their narratives focused on their own actions and choices, and how they enacted agency daily within those structures.

When discussing their reasons for starting, continuing, or choosing to stop doing sex work, participants demonstrated a continuum of experience, from sex work being something they enjoyed, relished, and appreciated, affording them financial freedom and time for other activities, to sex work being the only option they felt they had as a way of meeting essential needs. This range was directly linked to how much freedom and agency they felt they had in doing this work, and how constrained they felt by social structures.

Decisions made about how to operate their businesses were also constrained by the social structures with which participants interacted, and not all options were available to every person. However, they continued to enact agency within those confines, in their day-to-day choices about where to work, ensuring their own safety, the use of technology, and the prices they charged for their services.

In order to mitigate some of the constraining influences of social structures and identity intersects, participants used the sex work identities they constructed to perform their sex work roles in ways that suited their needs. These performances were themselves

acts of agency that can be seen as defiant of the power dynamics created by those structures.

Why Sex Work? "Just a Pimp and a Ho Thing"

Participants spoke animatedly about what they enjoyed about their work and how they personally benefitted from it. They spoke about the money, "I was making $1500 a week working four hours" (Nicole, independent escort work). They cited the pleasure of being paid for something they enjoyed, "I danced for 10 years. I retired second runner up, Miss Exotic World" (Nicole, independent escort work). "Man, I just got paid to be myself and do what I felt like doing" (Trish, webcam work). One described her work as a positive creative outlet. Participants discussed the financial freedom their work provided them, and the time it allowed them to pursue other meaningful activities such as family, friends, and art.

Nicole talked about the excitement of her work, in particular her past work travelling and stripping in different bars and clubs across Western Canada. "Go experience the world. Go be a stripper, man, cuz you get the neatest experiences as a stripper" (Nicole, independent escort work).

Nicole explained the freedom her work offered in terms of working few, flexible hours and making enough money for her needs in that time.

> So usually I'm still in my pajamas having coffee, posting my ads at eight in the morning. And then I go for my walk … and I can answer while I'm walking. Right? I can have it set up. Was it last week or the week before? I was done every day by five and I had $500 in my pocket by five (Nicole, independent escort work).

Trish echoed Nicole in the freedom she enjoyed. Being her own boss, setting her own schedule, and the ability to make quick money when she needed it made sex work an ideal job to allow her the opportunity to continue to study (Figure 17).

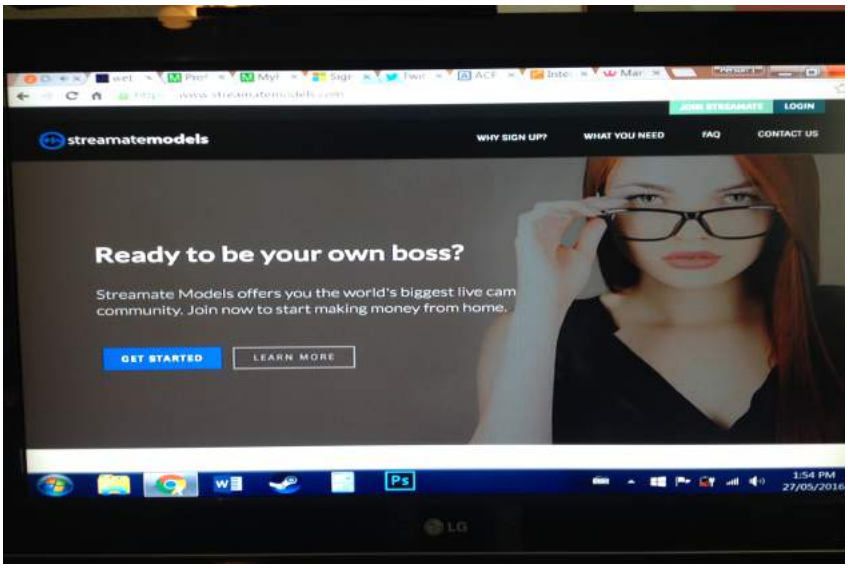

Figure 17. Be your own boss (Trish, webcam work)

Participants spoke about the glamour of getting dressed-up, flirting, acting sexy, and being the object of someone's affection, even if temporarily. Participants discussed the positive reinforcement of being desired for their looks and their skills, and the satisfaction of offering a service that satisfies people's needs "How can this be bad? I'm helping people have orgasms, I'm spreading happiness!" (Trish, webcam work).

Andrea cited the glamour of getting dressed up and going out, and the ability to make a lot of money as what first drew her to sex work. She started using crack cocaine and noticed that her friends who did sex work were able to do a job and make enough money to use in a short amount of time.

> I started smoking crack, and I was friends with hookers, and they would go out and come back with, you know not even half an hour and they'd have enough money to get some. So, it was, it was pretty glamorous right from the get-go, just to be able to get money that quick. Be able to maintain your addiction or whatever … It kinda was glamorous at a certain point, just 'cause you know, a certain night if you dress to party, you could make so much money, you know? (Andrea, outdoor work).

Isobel also talked about the glamour that she enjoyed about sex work at the beginning, at least in the part of her job that the world could see. “You’re in the spotlight, doin’ your thing, and it is just, you feel like you’re on top of the world at that moment. And then I was thinking behind stage it’s like falling apart” (Figure 18) (Isobel, outdoor work).

Figure 18. Glamour (Isobel, outdoor work)

She also admitted that the glamour waned over time.

> There’s definitely no glamour left in it, that’s for sure.… Even as I got older, I mean sure everybody, I mean I could remember a time when there was eight of us living in a house and, you know, we’re all getting ready for work and it’s like, it’s

> fun. You kind of feel like, you know, everybody was going out there and, you know, "who is going to make the most money the fastest?" and, you know, shit like that. But we were all stupid little girls, right? (Isobel, outdoor work)

Isobel also talked about how the lifestyle could be beautiful, but also how that beauty died with time. She talked about girls whose addiction drove their work, and how they worked for less and less in order to get what they needed. She saw that they no longer took pride in their work and how they dressed, instead going out in sweat pants and big hoodies to do a quick, cheap blowjob and buy a hit of crack. "Crack has really killed the business" (Isobel, outdoor sex work). But she also talked about how that beauty died over time even without addiction, and how the lifestyle is not sustainable.

> And that's it, I don't see any beauty in it anymore, because even back then, not everybody was working to support an addiction, right? Lots of people weren't working to support an addiction. It was just a pimp and a ho thing. You know, you lived in a nice place and you wore nice clothes, and the pimp drove a nice car and, you know? But, it kind of just dies, the lifestyle. Even without using (Isobel, outdoor work).

For her the lifestyle is both beauty and ugliness.

Figure 20. Beauty and ugliness (Isobel, outdoor work)

Limited Options. "I don't know how people do it, I don't get it, this life is really expensive." Participants discussed the many aspects that they enjoyed about their work and the reasons it appealed to them. However, for some participants the options were fewer, and despite the benefits of their work, it is important to recognize the constraints on their ability to choose other work if they wanted to. For example, Isobel talked about her start in the trade, how at 13 years of age she was introduced to a woman who would show her how to do sex work. "Well I can remember her coming to work and she had big fur jackets on, and just always looked amazing, right? And I used to think, 'oh I want to be just like her when I grow up.' You know? So, fuck" (Isobel, independent escort work).

Nellie also started at the age of 13. Her friend suggested they could make more money doing sex work than panhandling. Homeless at 13, she was unable to find legal work and so had few options.

> I had no home at 13 years old, no. I had no home, and I was living on the street, and, um, when [friend] said, "You know what we can do instead of panhandling?" And I was making eighty dollars a day, eighty dollars panhandling. Now you can come make like five hundred dollars a day, so you know? You could have a hotel because the guys'll rent you a room. So the first John of the day rents you the room, and the rest of the day you have the room, so I could have the street kids in at night, and take them all to Denny's for breakfast, you know what I mean? Like I'd have pizza and alcohol or whatever..… But I only became a prostitute because I had wanted the money and that's how you get money, you know? As a kid like, you can't work, you're too young to get a job. So, it was easy for me. And because my dad molested me, I guess, it never really hurt me in a way where I thought it was an issue (Nellie, independent escort work).

Both Isobel and Nellie made decisions in defiance of their age, class, and the limited social capital they possessed as broke and homeless teenagers who left homes because of abuse and neglect. The intersections of those identity points offered them limited choices and few prospects. They were unable to work legally and thus support

themselves, and their home lives and the parents and social services in their communities failed to protect them and support them, so they chose to be independent. Isobel wanted to emulate the beauty, poise and glamour represented by the woman in the fur coat, and at the time she saw sex work as the way to attain that glamour and make a better life for herself. Nellie found the work easy because of the sexual abuse in her past, and the rewards were great for a homeless teenager.

Even after 24 years Nellie said she did not mind the work and was grateful that she had been able to do it for so long, unharmed. However, she did resent the fact that she saw it as her only option to sustain her quality of life, including the money and time that sex work gave her to pursue her other interests.

> The only thing that affects me is that I hate that there's nothing else for me to do that um, gives me money. You know, that's the only thing that really gets me down, is that I really wanna do something, but I can't do anything that incurs enough money to live. Nothing. You know, I can't work at a restaurant, I've found out, working eight hours, five days a week and survive. I simply can't, I don't care, I wouldn't be able to paint or I wouldn't be able to um, pay the bills even. Really, you can't, so I don't know how people do it, I don't get it, this life is really expensive (Nellie, independent escort work).

Jenn was pressured into this work by her boyfriend. Andrea left the business because she was only doing it to support the addiction she had at the time. Isobel worked only occasionally to support her children when her two jobs did not cover rent, groceries, and expenses. For these women the benefits were that this job provided for their needs when a minimum wage job, EI cheque, or social service agency did not. Nicole, who sustained an injury that left her unable to do her job at the time, explains,

> I was 12 weeks waiting for my UIC [Unemployment Insurance Commission. This is an older term, it is called EI now] and it still hadn't come in. I had rent that was 1000 bucks a month and I went to welfare. They offered me one cheque for 800 bucks. I had a teenager at home … so it was homeless with my teenager or I turn to Craigslist (Nicole, independent escort work).

Darlene also had a choice between doing sex work to make rent or to be homeless. Her parole officer had approached her and offered to set up a date for her. She refused at first but when the choice came to that or homelessness, she chose to take the opportunity.

> We had a week to get out of our old house 'cuz we had found a basement suite and that's how I got this place. I had to come up with, I don't know, $1300 in a couple of weeks so I was like, "I would do it. I will not be homeless again in the middle of winter." It was fucking cold (Darlene, independent escort work).

Several participants discussed their criminal records as a barrier to doing other work. Isobel was unable to find a job that paid enough to support herself and her children. Her criminal record also prohibited her from achieving the higher education that she wanted because the program she started required a criminal record check for the practicum placements. Nicole cited her criminal record as a barrier to the career she wanted as well as to acquiring student loans to go back to school. Both of these individuals felt they had paid their debt to society but continued to be hampered by their past. Consequently, the only tool they felt they had to provide themselves with income and stability was, ironically, illegal.

In discussing the amount of police and criminal justice resources that were directed at enforcement of prostitution and drug laws, Isobel expressed that street Women were unfairly targeted under both sets of laws. She explained that many outdoor workers suffered from addiction, and by enforcing sex work legislation that targeted the buyers of sex, police made sex work more difficult, which then drove Women to instead sell drugs to make the money they needed. She did not feel it was realistic that they would simply not sell sex, but that they had to pay for their drugs somehow because otherwise they would be sick. Without the relatively harmless sex work between consenting adults, she explained that they were left no other option but to sell drugs, which represented a bigger

crime with a longer sentence, so it was worse for the Woman. She argued that not only did that drain criminal justice resources and tax dollars; it increased crime rates and again, targeted the more marginalized Woman over the john.

> I know because I've sold crack too. I know what crack's done to the business, but it just, it makes me sad because if I had to sell my ass to support an addiction I could never do it. My addiction was huge when I used. So if my addiction was huge then most people's probably are. So these poor girls. Do you know how much $20 is to support an addiction? That's like, you do it, you go out, you do a hoot, you go back to the street. So I feel terrible. Right? There needs to be more, like in Edmonton there was a stroll and they made it so difficult, not for the girls to be on the street, but for guys to be there. There were signs everywhere, like this is a no-work zone. And if you do get caught they take your car. They had bait cars set up there so then people. When I was in jail there were so many girls in there who were prostitutes but just couldn't do it because there's no dates. So they sell a piece of crack and get a two-year sentence. So now they're in jail a few years and now the tax payers and the crime levels go up. So what does the government and police think they're serving a purpose, when the guy's making a choice too, you know (Isobel, outdoor work).

Isobel drew attention to the direct result of enforcement strategies that targeted sex work clients rather than Women. At the least she saw these strategies as ineffective, citing her 27 prostitution charges where she told the officers each time,

> alright well go ahead then, I'll just get bailed out and see you on the stroll tomorrow. I'm still gonna do what I gotta do to pay the fine, so if you guys think you're helping me out by doing that [laughs] (Isobel, outdoor work).

At the worst she described how the strategies negatively impacted Women by putting them in a position where they sold crack because they were unable to sell sex to support their addiction. The jail time they did then also negatively impacted the community because of the increased crime and increased tax dollars for incarceration.

> So I don't know, I really don't know the answer, but people think the prostitute's the bad guy, right? Or the date's the bad guy. Well when two people, if she's got an addiction people say, "well just get clean and get off the fucking street." Well it's not that easy. And lots of people use to mask what they're feeling. So really, where are the programs, the services? You know I went to jail. I got a ten-year sentence. I went to jail and they rammed all these programs down my throat. I got out and what was the first thing I did? I used. And then as soon as I couldn't

> support my habit I sold my ass. So I'm just like, "you guys are stupid." Until I went back. After eight years I finally went into this program called dialectical behavioural therapy, and that is where they really made me look at my whole crime cycle. "And right before you do a crime, what are you thinking? What are you feeling?" Until I really started looking at what are the things that led me to start doing these things did I stop using and stop doing these things, right? So I'm like, why does everybody say drug treatment, drug treatment? It's not the drugs that need to be treated, it's the emotional (Isobel, outdoor work).

Instead of the current focus on prostitution and drug laws, which Isobel admits is less in Lethbridge at this time than it was in Medicine Hat where she worked in the past, she would like to see more time and resources focused on support, counselling, mental health, and addictions. In her experience the arrest, fines, jail time, and forced rehabilitation programs did nothing to discourage her drug use, sex work, or crime, nor did they help her find an alternative. It was not until she found a therapy that helped her understand her past pain and her thought patterns, that she was empowered to make positive change in her life. It should be noted that for her, positive change included stopping drugs and other crime, but not stopping sex work. Though also illegal, sex work was still a way to make money and support her children that worked for her, and she saw no reason to stop it.

Jenn was the only participant who spoke about being coerced into sex work. Her emotionally and physically abusive boyfriend pressured her into having sex with his friends for money. The first time he split the profits with her. Later he organized a "gang bang" that resulted in multiple and ongoing injuries for her, and he kept all of the profits. She was able to leave him shortly after that incident, but chose to continue to do occasional sex work to meet her own needs.

Jenn spoke at length about how her mental health problems, ADHD, and FASD contributed to her vulnerability. She had trouble recognizing when someone wanted to

exploit her for sex. Because of this she found herself in dangerous situations on multiple occasions. She spoke about being propositioned when she was simply riding the bus or waiting for someone. She consciously chose to wear her headphones and listen to music while out, in an attempt to discourage random propositioning. Because of the vulnerability she recognizes, she no longer wanted to do sex work but at times found herself in a position where transactional sex work (trading sex for goods) was sometimes the only way she could obtain food, cigarettes, a ride, or whatever else she might need. Jenn did not want to do sex work, partly because she recognized her own vulnerability; however, she continued to use it as a tool when necessary.

> Well to be honest I kind of asked him for it. I kind of needed smokes but I mean, he just gave it to me like it was nothing. Well I don't want that anymore. That's not me. I don't want to do that to myself because I can't. I'm way better. I can't. I gotta come to a stop. I'm way better. Cuz one of these days I'm going to end up in the dirt (Jenn, independent escort work).

The decisions that participants made about starting sex work, and about whether to continue doing the work or stop depended heavily on their social position. Trish acknowledged the privilege she had, demonstrating self and social awareness.

> So I'm a sex worker but I feel like I'm very different from a lot of them. Like if you start looking at this I got white privilege, I'm educated, I've always had resources and opportunity my whole life. I've been upper-middle class, I don't have any kids, you know…. I've never grown up as a minority, I've never grown up in poverty, which I know a lot of sex workers, that's why they turn to sex work, 'cuz they don't really have anything else. And I've always been safe, and my work in particular I think is extra safe.… I don't know what it's like to sort of, live on the other side (Trish, webcam work).

Participants experienced stigma in different ways, and for some their age, class, and social position compounded it, but all experienced stigma as a constraining factor because they did sex work. Nicole talked about how she was treated poorly by local

business owners when they learned what she does, despite the fact that she brought them business.

> I'm barred from [local hotel] because I was meeting a couple clients. They say, "well can I take you to dinner?" "Okay well meet me in the lounge." And the girl says I was soliciting in the lounge. It's like, "no, no honey, you don't understand, even my son will tell you, I'm too lazy to get all dolled up and sit there and talk to people," especially since I don't drink. I can't stand drunks. "I bring business to your hotel. Cuz now they're eating and drinking in your lounge. And they're going to rent a room there cuz they're coming in from out of town. So I just gave you $200, shut the fuck up."… Ya, she didn't like my response, I'm barred for life. And what gets me is the owner backed her up, I'm like, "really? You give her like, two grand a month? My hotel bill was like seven grand for the month. And I ate there. And my clients came there" (Nicole, independent escort work).

There are times when stigma from society directly impinges on participants' ability to do their job or operate in society outside of sex work. Trish described an incident where she hired someone to set up a website for her to sell her nude videos and photos. The individual used PayPal as the payment platform, but PayPal states in their acceptable use policy that they cannot be used with sexually oriented materials or services. She was then permanently unable to activate a PayPal account after that, which has continued to hinder her ability to purchase goods and access services online.

> It's fucking annoying because there's so many services online that use PayPal and I can't use it, like at all. Just because I got caught selling nude videos with their service.… It's extra shitty because lately I've been looking into other ways to make money online, and there's a lot of transcription work, and a lot of stuff like that, but they all pay through PayPal (Trish, webcam work).

Participants in this research described to varying degrees the constraints on their work options. Some, like Trish, had many options and much freedom to enact agency in their choice of work and how they operated their businesses. Others had fewer options, but all chose the work within the confines of their individual situations. They might have made other choices, but for them, sex work gave them the freedom, money, glamour, or independence that they were looking for.

Darlene talked about the type of people who choose sex work. In her opinion, most of them have been through some sort of pain, and that understanding of and even attraction to pain was what drew them to this work.

> I think most people that choose this career have either mental health issues or a dark history. [It's] just something appealing, it just makes the job more appealing. I don't know why. When I was young I wanted to be a high-end hooker. Like I was really young—a kid, like eight, nine. Yeah. I got called into the principal's office and shit, like it was fucked up. But I just feel like the majority of people that choose this career have to have something that's messed up in their history to want to choose such a demeaning job. Not because it's demeaning in society but because you can come across a lot of bad calls, and those bad calls, they really wreck your day. They probably wreck your week. You know? And to be able to put yourself in such a high-risk situation, not only with the clients but with sexual diseases and the chance of being abused, killed, you know, raped. There's just so many things that could go wrong. And to be able to put yourself in that position and be strong about it, and have a positive outlook on it and see the beauty in it—it takes a special kind of person who's been through a lot of pain and they know what hurt is—be it mental health issues, be it a dark history (Darlene, escort agency work).

Time to move on. Andrea talked about her decision to stop working. She no longer needed the money to support her addiction, she wanted out and did not want to go back to that life.

> I found a decent man, and I didn't wanna use drugs anymore. And I was tired of sellin' my ass to get crack money. I just don't have it in me anymore. I don't have a desire to use the crack anymore, so I don't need the money. You know? I have a wonderful boyfriend who, you know, he treats me like gold … so there's no reason for me to be down there anymore. I'm on AISH, I get enough money to get by, but when I was using that wasn't enough to cover my addiction. I had been broke from my cheque in one day. And you know, even the same day as cheque day you know, that night you're goin' back out just to get money, right? So, it's just not in me anymore. That part of my life is a closed chapter. I don't, just had enough. I was down there for ten years, you know? And regular life, that's like thirty years or, when you're workin' on the street, you know? When you live in the street life, one year is equivalent to three years in regular life. So, I put in my time down there (Andrea, outdoor work).

Andrea admitted to having lost friends to drugs, alcohol, and sex work. For her those worlds are entwined, and she sees them as too dangerous now. Sex work was

necessary for her at one point. The need to pay for her addiction outweighed the risks at the time, but now that she no longer has that need, the spiritual, emotional, and mental toll combined with the risk of harm were too great and so she decided never to do sex work again.

> There's better ways to get money than to put my life at risk again like that. One of my girlfriends was murdered this summer, and that pretty much cemented the fact that I don't ever wanna go down there again. They found her body in the river in Pincher Creek. I've lost countless friends to drugs, alcohol. Yep. Lots. It comes with the territory. It's not a very nice lifestyle for anybody. Even if you can afford it. Eventually it's gonna bankrupt you spiritually or emotionally, or mentally (Andrea, outdoor work).

Now that she was out, Andrea felt strongly that she would never go back to sex work. She showed her contradictory emotions about the sex trade, saying on one hand that if people wanted to work they should work in a structured environment that was safer because other people were involved and aware of the transaction. However she then went on to say that indoor establishments enabled sex work by removing the risk, which was an important deterrent.

> I don't know, I'm kind of against the whole thing now like … I don't think that they should make a place that caters to it, just 'cause, it would just enable, it would, um, kinda make it a little more glamorous to be down there, you know like, "oh yeah, we can," you know, "you can go pick any guy and he'll pay you this much, and you bring up here and everything's gonna be all good." You know, it takes a lot of, I guess the risk out of it. And even if they were to do it that way, it's still is a really high-risk lifestyle (Andrea, outdoor work).

Andrea also admitted that though she knew about the risks and even experienced two significant assaults, at that time the quick money that could be made to buy the drugs to which she was addicted was a bigger draw than the danger.

> I needed to get money and like, all I cared about was the drugs, so, you know, as long as I have money to get drugs, it was okay.… I've always been aware of them [the risks], but I never really, I kind of took it all in stride, you know, just kind of went with the flow. Most of the time I never had a problem. So, those two instances that did go kind of bad or whatever, sure they make me a little more

> timid and stuff, but I still went about my business the same as I always did. When you're that, when you're that deep in addiction to whatever it is, you don't really care what happens, as long as you get the drugs (Andrea, outdoor work).

Darlene was acutely aware that there will be a time when she needs to stop doing sex work because of the emotional toll, but for the time being she will continue to do her job because it serves her.

> I feel like it will get harder and harder and eventually I will need to quit my job because I won't be able to handle it anymore. I know these things. But in the now, I will work this job because I can. Fuck it (Darlene, escort agency work).

All of the participants in this research except Trish and Nellie experienced violence in their work, in the form of bad dates and from other Women and police. Their experiences with violence influenced their decisions around safety precautions and how they decided to work, but did not cause any of them to stop doing sex work. In contrast, emotional burnout led to periods of several months at a time where Trish did not do sex work. She had other income from her retail job, so she took time to recover herself and her emotional strength and then resumed sex work when she felt able to. Other participants like Nellie and Nicole also reported periods where they did not do sex work because they did not have to. For them, sex work meets their needs whenever necessary. It is important to recognize the constraints on the choices that each participant had available to them at any given time, but despite these, they continue to exercise the power they do have to make choices about whether to continue working, stop, or take a break from sex work.

Running a Business: "It's Like Any Other Kind of Job Except I'm Having Sex With People"

Participants described their work like other types of self-employment or home business. They chose strategies to make the business run more efficiently, that made the

work safer or less risky, and that suited personal needs. Participants actively solicited clients, set client-service provision ground rules, registered with appropriate agencies, and paid taxes. How participants chose to run their businesses was influenced by their individual sex work identities and their needs at the time.

Choosing a workplace. There are benefits and drawbacks to different sex work environments, and participants made choices about where they worked based on their needs and what the work environment could offer them. Trish chose to do webcam work because the safety of having no physical contact with clients was appealing, and she liked the ease and anonymity of webcam work. She felt liberated to embody her sex work persona and act more directly and boldly than she did in her other identities. She was able to sign in and work as much or as little as she wanted without worrying about posting ads or being available for a shift. Nicole used to strip and do exotic dancing in clubs because she could make a lot of money working few hours that way, but as her increasing age made securing that work more difficult and her addiction made working for somebody else less feasible, she chose private escorting from her home so that she had greater control over when she worked. Darlene chose escort agency work because of the simplicity of having someone else set up the dates and the safety that came with having the clients screened by the agency and a driver who also acted as a security guard. Andrea admitted that working in an escort agency may generate greater and more regular income, but she talked about the immediate rewards that came with street sex work. She was able to work whenever she needed it, as opposed to having to wait for a manager to organize a date for her. The freedom of working for herself suited her spontaneity.

> If you wanna go through an agency, that's where you'll get the most money. 'Cause I never ever, well I don't know, I was, I was always the spontaneous type, if I wanted something I would go get it. Being an escort or whatever,

> you kinda gotta wait around for calls, you know, so maybe you have an appointment booked, and you're all booked for this one day or something, you know? Sure that's probably better, because you get more regular cash, you know? Like working downtown it's, hit or miss, you know? Some days you'll make some money, some days you won't. Some days you'll make eight hundred dollars a night, and another day you won't make eighty dollars, you know? So, it's all, it's pretty random down there (Andrea, outdoor work).

Ensuring safety. Participants discussed a broad range of precautions that they took to keep themselves physically safe while working. Darlene carried a knife and used condoms (Figure 20).

Figure 20. Safety first (Darlene, escort agency work)

On her partner's insistence Nellie installed a panic button in her home bedroom, and only did dates while he was home and able to respond to an emergency (Figure 21).

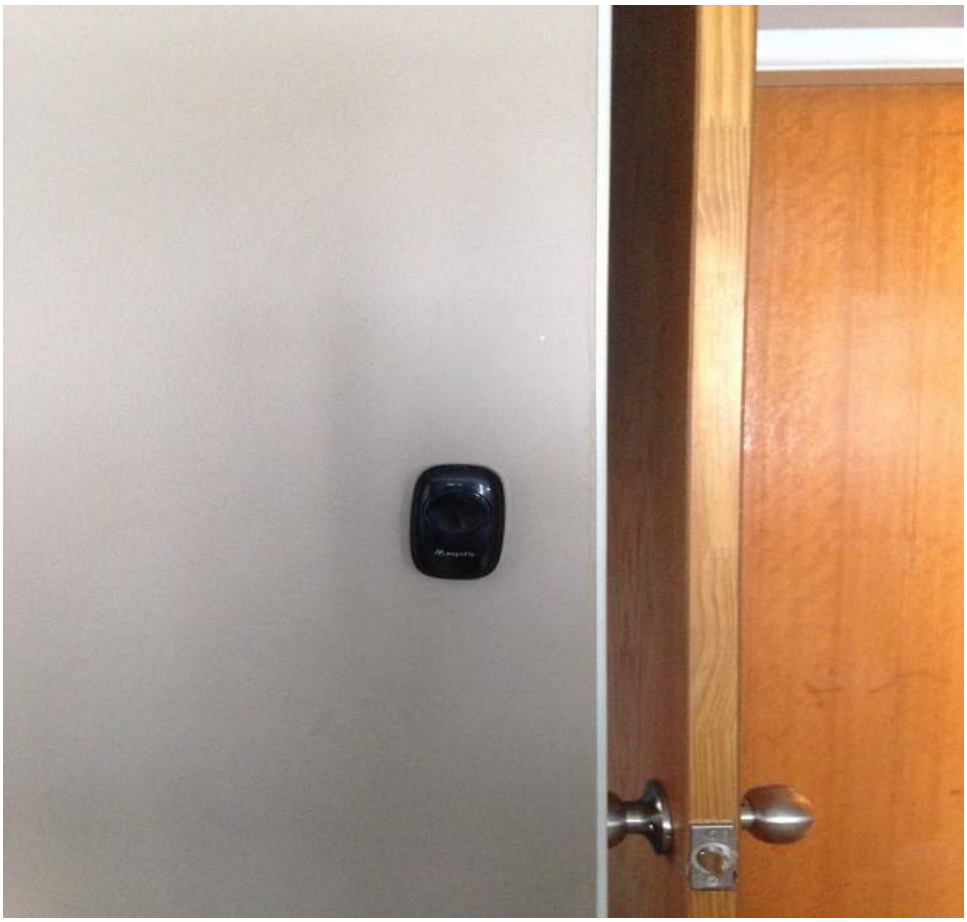

Figure 21. Panic button (Nellie, independent escort work)

Darlene used a driver from the escort agency who also acted as a bodyguard. The driver waited outside during the date, gave a five-minute warning call when the time was up, and if Darlene did not come out during those five minutes the driver would enter, using force if necessary.

Andrea talked about safety measures she took when working outdoors, and how those changed with time as her addiction increased, and then again after an assault.

> I mean way way back when I first started working downtown, oh, 'bout mid 2000, and there was a whole group of us, so if one of us girls would go, or whatever, or if all three of us would go, and we'd all come back or whatever—one of those guys would be watching for us. But, yeah after so long, you know, you get so in depth in your addiction, you don't wanna come back for all those people, you know? You go out, you make your money, you get your own dope, and you don't have to share with everybody. So I became more independent that way. But you

> know, if you have a close girlfriend, you know, they both are doin' the same thing, and you're both working towards the same goal, it's safer for both of you, because, like after I first got beat up there, I wouldn't go anywhere without [friend], I wouldn't go anywhere without her. She would come with me, or vice versa, she would bring me with her, you know (Andrea, outdoor work)?

When Andrea started working, Women would go on dates together and party together, sharing the profits and the drugs. If someone went alone, someone else from the group would be watching for them to come back, and again they would share the money and the drugs. As her addiction grew, Andrea started doing her own dates and buying her own drugs to avoid sharing (Figure 22). However, with this independence came greater danger. At one point she was severely beaten after a date and left for dead (Figure 23). After that she returned to doing dates with one of her friends for safety.

Figure 22. Lonely streets (Andrea, outdoor work)

Figure 23. Scene of the attack (Andrea, outdoor work)

Safety measures are relative. Isobel described some local Women who were choosing to use stimulants like crystal meth (N-methylamphetamine) instead of their usual drug of choice, because on this stimulant they could stay awake for several days without the need for food or sleep. The suggestion was that for these women, the physical and mental dangers of going on a several day stimulant bender were preferable to the difficulties of finding food and safe shelter daily. We discussed the limited social supports available to those struggling with an addiction—especially as a woman and/or an

Indigenous person where safety and racism are additional burdens. Isobel felt strongly that the available supports were sorely inadequate.

I agreed with her. In Lethbridge, there is one homeless shelter, and one women's shelter. From my patients at the methadone clinic I have heard many stories of theft and assault at the homeless shelter, there is a high amount of drugs moving through the facility, and overdoses are common. My patients tell me that the women's shelter tends to be relatively safer and more secure, but it is difficult to get a bed there as it is usually at capacity. There is nowhere else for a homeless person to sleep indoors in Lethbridge, so many people camp outside, even in the frigid winters. I had a patient who used to tie herself up high in a tree to sleep, because she felt unsafe at the shelter and was banned from the women's shelter. She hoped that she would remain out of sight and out of reach of potential assailants from her perch, and the rope helped ensure she did not fall.

There is a housing program now in Lethbridge, but the wait list to get a place is long, and many people remain homeless for months or longer. Financial assistance is often inadequate to cover rent, especially for a multi-bedroom unit, if the individual has children. This disproportionately affects women, who are more often left with the children in a separation. As Nicole described earlier, the amount of EI offered to her fell short of her rent, so she chose sex work rather than homelessness with her child.

Racism, especially against Indigenous peoples is prevalent in Lethbridge. My patients, as well as individuals I know from the university tell me that they have difficulties finding a place that will rent to them, or finding a job because of their last name or the colour of their skin. None of the participants in this research described this scenario, but only one participant could be described as visibly Indigenous, and none of their last names were obviously so.

Using technology. Technology was an important part of sex work for all of the participants. Indoor workers relied on technology to solicit or do their work, but even those who did outdoor solicitation, where technology was not necessary for solicitation or doing sex work, talked about the importance of carrying a phone for safety.

For participants who did independent escort work, a portion of their time each day was spent online, renewing and posting their ads. Nellie said that her work would not be possible without her cell phones (Figure 24). Participants in Lethbridge mainly used Backpage (which has since been shut down, but it is unclear how this has affected business) and the adult section of Craigslist, while others used Plenty of Fish (an online dating site). In order to keep their ads near the top of the page, it was necessary to repost daily, with a small fee per ad, per day.

Figure 24. Technology works for me (Nellie, independent escort work)

Nicole explained how most workers in Lethbridge paid with pre-paid credit cards until an online petition argued that Paypal, Visa, and Mastercard were enabling sex work.

In an effort to "protect" Women, payment options switched to bit coin. She described the switch as frustrating because most workers were not able to post or consequently work until they acquired the online currency. It was also infuriating because of the patriarchal attitude of those who launched the petition in the name of protecting those who did not want protecting.

Trish's work was exclusively online as she did webcam work and sold videos and photos online. She felt it is the future of the sex work industry, and her social and extroverted sex work identity enjoyed the connections she was able to make with people around the world.

> I'm pretty positive, like this stuff online and things, like in terms of people just putting their own ads and then still meeting someone in person, but also people who don't end up meeting and just, you know, do the webcam thing. Like, I don't think that's going anywhere. I think it's only gonna grow, and it's only gonna change the face of. Just because it's easy access, it's anonymous, and I mean especially when you're not going to meet anyone, it's a lot safer. And I mean, one of the biggest things that keeps people from sex work, I think, is probably the stigma and the safety issues. So if you go all online, you know, that's gone. And then, I just think of too, like posting. If I were ever to like actually meet someone and you know, perform some sex work in person with somebody, I feel like it would be a lot easier to just put an ad all online and do it that way, than in the past where you didn't really have that option.… And I don't know but I also just have this idea in general that the internet is not going anywhere. And I think in a lot of ways it's gonna help solve a lot of things because it's collaboration across the world. It's free flow of information, like it's so powerful. And I mean, for me I love that I can connect with people that are on the other side of the world. I mean, once you're on the Internet your client base is now the entire world—anywhere that has Internet (Trish, webcam work).

Setting prices. Pricing seemed to be somewhat standard in each city depending on the services offered and the location where work was performed (i.e., street, massage parlour, escort agency, or private escort). Isobel expressed concern about other Women accepting lower prices for services, thus driving down the market for everyone else. She attributed this to desperation that can be brought on by addiction—"crack has killed the

business"—and is concerned that accepting lower prices because of addiction has larger implications for all Women in the area.

> It seems like it's getting worse and worse because it's getting cheaper, and so more active. And that's what I try to say to girls that are still actively using. You guys, you're not only worth $20. And I'm not saying there's even a dollar amount to your worth, but you guys got to have some self respect because if you're charging $20 and you're charging $100, you're going to be worked to death and you're going to be poor. Right? So you guys got to come to a medium and respect that. And if it takes you guys a couple of weeks to break that into people that, "we're not doing it for $20 anymore," they're going to come back. Because they, the streets, were packed before. The drive's not going away. They might think about it for a while and hum and haw about it, but in a couple weeks you're feeling better about, not necessarily better about yourself but you're doing better than you were two weeks ago when you were. And you know what, they don't listen either, so (Isobel, outdoor work).

Accepting lower prices drives down the larger market for Women services in the area. This puts everyone in a tight position where they are forced to either work for less or lose clients. In order to prevent this problem, Nicole spoke of a "code" among workers, where it was not acceptable to take lower than the average price for services. This code was self-policed and Nicole told of threatening or spreading rumours to discredit another worker who violated the code.

> I gave her work one time and she totally fucking scammed me, burned me. And I was like, "oh honey, that's so sweet but you're working with a baby in your house and you're taking Shady 80's [a synthetic fentanyl-like opioid common on the street at the time], and I have informed the police. You've lowered the price of everyone here in [city], so go fuck yourself." Cuz we do have a little bit of a code here (Nicole, independent escort work).

In this way prices were stabilized and work continued.

Through this theme, I explored how participants made choices and enacted agency within the structural barriers that served to constrain them. Their decisions were facilitated or hindered by their unique intersections of race, age, class, and the social position they were in, leaving some with relatively more freedom than others to enact

agency, but still all of them told their stories and made their photos to illustrate the decisions they made and the actions they took in their experiences doing sex work in Lethbridge.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to present the findings of this research. After analysis of the photos, with participants' guidance, and of the interview transcripts I created three themes that I felt represented the meanings within the narratives and photos, and that addressed the research question, "What are the experiences of several women who engage in sex work in Lethbridge?"

In the first, *performing identities: "I'm not a whore, I'm not a slut, I'm not a skank. I'm just me,"* I described how participants created multiple identities in order to perform their different roles as partner, mother and Woman. The different identities allowed for separation of these roles, which was particularly important with roles that may have otherwise been conflicting, like partner and Woman, and mother and sex worker. In order to move between roles and maintain role separation, participants engaged in rituals to shed one identity and take on another.

In the second theme, *boundaries control intimacy*: *"You actually have to physically and emotionally attach yourself to a human and then detach yourself immediately after,"* I explained why participants found it necessary to create boundaries in their interactions with clients in order to protect themselves emotionally. It detailed different strategies they used to achieve that goal, including substance use and mental disengagement to avoid intimacy altogether. Other strategies that allowed some intimacy but also ensured that interactions remained within participant boundaries included connecting and then disconnecting with clients, and acting. These last two strategies

involved participants performing the sex work identities they created, in order to manage the interaction and control the intimacy within it.

In the third theme, *enacting agency: "For now I will do this job because I can. Fuck it,"* I explored the decisions participants made about their work. This included why they chose to do or continue sex work—whether for freedom, glamour, or because they had limited options, and how they recognized when it was time to stop or take a break from sex work. It also described how participants made choices about running their businesses—choosing a workplace, ensuring their own safety, using technology, setting prices, and engaging (or avoiding) the criminal justice system. These decisions were all bound by the structural barriers that served to constrain them such as stigma and the laws, as well as the individual intersecting identity points that worked to facilitate or hinder their options. The choices participants made within those bounds, around whether and how they did sex work, were impacted by their sex work identities, and conversely their work lives dictated pieces of their identities.

These themes explore participant experiences in creating and managing different identities specific to the roles they perform, and setting and maintaining boundaries with their clients in order to protect themselves emotionally. The final theme provides nuance in describing participant experiences enacting agency daily. It recognizes the constraints that social structures such as stigma and the criminal justice and social service systems impose, and acknowledges the effects of individual identity points in shaping experience. Together, the themes contribute to the literature on identity work, strategies for emotional protection, and agency in sex work. The next chapter will discuss participant voices and photos in relation to the broader literature, helping to make meaning out of the themes that came from the research.

Chapter Five: Discussion

In this research study, I asked participants to use photovoice to describe and explore their experiences doing sex work in Lethbridge. I presented participants' stories and photos in the previous chapter, and in this chapter I discuss those findings in relationship to the broader literature and situate them within the larger discourse to address the research question—what are the experiences of several women who engage in sex work in Lethbridge?

This discussion is grounded in feminist standpoint theory, recognizing the participants as experts in understanding their world and the context in which their experiences are played out. Throughout the chapter, I acknowledge the influence of individual intersecting identity points in mediating each participants' experiences, and in making meaning out of their experiences.

Thematic analysis of interview transcripts and photos resulted in three major themes. In the first, *performing identities: "I'm not a whore, I'm not a slut, I'm not a skank. I'm just me,"* I describe how participants actively constructed an identity specific to their work, and managed it along with different identities they have for other roles in their lives. In the second, *boundaries control intimacy*: *"You actually have to physically and emotionally attach yourself to a human and then detach yourself immediately after,"* I discuss the ways in which participants controlled the depth of the interactions they have with clients. In the final theme, *enacting agency: "For now I will do this job because I can. Fuck it,"* I explore participants' interactions within and contributions to the social structures imposed on them, and how they enacted agency to resist the imposition of those structures.

Performing Identities: "I'm Not a Whore, I'm Not a Slut, I'm Not a Skank, I'm Just Me."

Participants in this research described their roles as partners, mothers, and Women. This theme reflects how they actively constructed, performed, and managed different identities to perform each of these roles, using the literature to contextualize and explain the process.

The Process of Identity Construction

Women are continually reminded of what society thinks and feels about them by the media (Janzen et al., 2013; Larter, 2011; Strega et al., 2014), by law enforcement (Krüsi et al., 2016; Lyons, Krüsi, Pierre, et al., 2017), by healthcare workers (Lazarus et al., 2011; Roche & Keith, 2014), and by the general public (Krüsi et al., 2016). However, the process of identity construction is more than the passive acceptance of those ideas. Identity construction is the active process of choosing what to accept or reject from externally imposed identities. Orchard et al. (2013) described the process for Women in Ottawa. They outlined the "syndrome of ideas" (p. 192) that made up their participants' different identities, which were fashioned by selecting identity components from what they perceived from those around them, and combining those identity components with their own beliefs and feelings about their world. They actively constructed different identities and chose to use specific identities according to their needs and feelings at a certain time.

In sharing about themselves, participants in this research offered insight into this active process of identity construction. They described their understandings about how society and others in their lives view them in specific roles, and they explained which of these they internalized in their own evolving identities and why. Participants described

themselves in varying and often contradictory ways. Their own feelings and what they perceived to be the feelings of others towards their work and other aspects of their lives influenced how they understood themselves. They "dr[ew] on and resist[ed] various discourses around intimacy, performance, and pleasure in regards to their sex work and their personal lives" to form those identities (Smith, 2017, p. 241). However, those identities were not singular or static, but rather varied with time and place.

Both Andrea and Isobel discussed the glamour they saw in sex work before they started, and in the early days of their work. They saw the work as exciting, sparkly, and bright, and were drawn to the quick money and the fun of getting dressed up, flirting, and being desired. At first, they incorporated this into their sex work identity, but with time they felt disillusioned with the whole scene, seeing instead the chaos of the sex work world. They then rejected the glamour as a façade, and their identities as Women became darker.

Trish described derogatory labels such as "home wrecker," "whore," and "slut" that she felt society places on Women; however, she, along with Nellie and Nicole, chose to reject those labels in their own identities as Women. They considered themselves good people and asserted that their work contributes to people's happiness.

Externally imposed identity components. These identity components come from other individuals in participants' lives, from the community, and from society in general. They represent participants' perceptions of how others felt about them as individuals and about different aspects of their lives, specifically in relation to their work. Some of these identity components remained external while others were internalized and integrated into participants' evolving identities.

Partners. Participants' partners in this research had a large impact on how participants felt about themselves and their work, contributing in a powerful way to their identities. All five who had partners told their partners about their work and the extent to which the support they felt affected how they were able to balance their sex work identities with their other identities, like partner or mother. Koken (2012) found that Women who selectively disclose their work have better support networks and are thus better able to manage the stigma that surrounds it. She noted that participants who had supportive people with whom they could share were more comfortable with their sex work role, and those who felt they had to hide their work or who had negative disclosure experiences carried a more negative image of their work. For example, Jenn's boyfriend pushed her into sex work and pressured her to offer services and do dates she did not want to do. She finally left him but continued to see sex work as dirty and something she tried to resist but to which she found herself succumbing.

Darlene's partner was supportive as long as she remained emotionally healthy. She no longer told him details about her work, but turned to him for love and security after a bad day. This need for separation between home and work lives is echoed in the literature; the worker's home life can act as an emotional safe haven from the negative emotions that sometimes come with sex work. By maintaining the separation, the Woman can retreat to that safe space after work (Jackson et al., 2009; Murphy, Dunk-West, & Chonody, 2015). The support of Darlene's partner helped her balance her identity as a Woman with her home identity, which they both felt was more important. In order to protect her partner from the difficult emotions and the stigma she experiences as a Woman, Darlene learned that it was important to separate her identity as a Woman from her home identity. This protected her partner and her relationship, but it also meant that

she was left to carry the burden of the stigma alone, which is a risk identified in other sex work research as well (Blithe & Wolfe, 2017).

Darlene and her partner even had an agreed upon plan to quit sex work, if either one of them felt she was emotionally at risk or if she withdrew as the person she was in their lives outside of her work. Having an exit strategy is described by Ham and Gilmour (2017) as a prudent strategy used by some Women to ensure their survival in an position they recognize as temporary. For those workers, an exit strategy is not about escaping trauma or exploitation, but rather a recognition that they will continue in this job until it suits them to move on, and that they are prepared for that situation when it arises.

Nellie's partner did not like her to do sex work, but also asked her to when money was tight, and acted as her bodyguard and her sounding board afterward. Nellie was similarly conflicted about her work and echoed his contradictory emotions about it. At times, she said she was comfortable with what she does and what it was able to contribute to her life, and at other times she declared that she was tired of the lying to clients, pretending about how she felt about them, and wanted to move on and not have to do it anymore. She also expressed resignation because she did not see a different way of making the money she needed with the flexibility she desired. Despite her conflicting emotions, she managed to put her reservations aside and balance her work with her other identities as partner, artist, and mother. She compartmentalized her sex work identity as a necessary part of a job that was not really representative of herself as a person. She contended that she made the choice to do sex work because it allowed her the time and money to live the life that she wanted to live, with complexities and depth and interests beyond her job. Her perception of the choice she was making in doing this work allowed her the peace to reconcile those identities. The feeling of having agency within one's

situation is commonly cited as influencing happiness in Women's identities. It is also important in reconciling roles such as partner or mother with Woman (Abel, 2011; Benoit et al., 2017; Dodsworth, 2014).

Motherhood. Motherhood is often seen as incompatible with sex work (Bromwich & DeJong, 2015; Dewey, Orchard, & Brown, 2018; Dodsworth, 2014), but the reality for participants in this research was more nuanced. Not only must mothers who do sex work reconcile the two identities for themselves, they face the additional concerns of stigma, criminalization, or forced child apprehension (Dewey et al., 2018; Dodsworth, 2014). Jenn expressed the hope that her child would not follow her path and do drugs or engage in sex work. Her child was removed from her care, and while she maintained that she was a good mother and retained hope of regaining custody one day, she acknowledged that the child was well cared for and implied that the current situation was best for the moment because she did not see sex work and motherhood as compatible. She did not see sex work as a choice she made, but rather something to which she occasionally succumbed and had guilt about afterward. This is consistent with other literature on mothers who perceive less choice about their involvement in sex work, and therefore view it negatively and not part of being a good mother (Abel, 2011; Benoit et al., 2017; Bromwich & DeJong, 2015; Dewey, 2011; Dodsworth, 2014).

However, most participants in this research did not feel that sex work and motherhood were incompatible. Nellie gave custody of her child to the father because of her drug use. She did not feel that sex work had any bearing on her ability to parent, but recognized that drug use did. She remained in contact and had a relationship with her child. Her choice in the matter allowed her to have more peace about the situation than did other participants who lost custody involuntarily. It also allowed her to reconcile "the

paradox of being not only a non-resident but also a good-mother" (Dodsworth, 2014, p. 103), knowing she made the best decision she could for her child.

Isobel had two sets of children, the older ones grown and living on their own. She expressed regrets about missing much of their childhood during her lengthy prison sentence, and then dragging them along in the chaos of her drug use. She saw their drug use and criminal behaviour as an inevitable extension of her own. She was trying to do things differently with the younger children; as a single parent, she worked two jobs, and had stopped using drugs. She still did sex work but did not find that incompatible with her role as a good mother the way she did drug use. Rather she felt her children were too young to know about her work and needed to be protected from that knowledge. At the same time, she also saw that she was much better able to provide for them by doing sex work as her two other jobs did not provide sufficient resources. Reconciling her identity as a Woman and as a good mother was not a problem for Isobel because she felt agency over her decision to do sex work when it suited her and in order to better perform her role as a mother by providing for her children. This link between agency and the comfort that women feel in their roles as both Woman and mother is well established in the literature (Abel, 2011; Bromwich & DeJong, 2015; Dewey, 2011; Dodsworth, 2014). For Isobel, being a strong provider was more central to her identity as a mother than the type of work she did—she defined herself as a mother by her ability to provide rather than by the specific methods of provision.

Ethnicity. Ethnicity was often noted in the literature as an important identity component, both externally imposed in cases of racism, and internally reinforced in an individual's self-identification (Crenshaw, 1991; Duff et al., 2014; Palmater, 2011). Ethnicity is even important to identity in its erasure. Cultural genocide, such as

assimilation of Indigenous children in the form of child apprehension by the residential school system and child welfare system, has left a grim legacy in Canada. These racialized policies continue to be enacted today in the high numbers of Indigenous children who are removed from their families for inappropriate reasons such as poverty, and who are often placed with culturally unsuitable families (Bingham et al., 2014; Duff et al., 2014; Truth and Reconcilitaion Commission of Canada, 2015). Such programs have a powerful impact by stripping away cultural identity, and therefore connection, for generations.

For example, my own grandmother was a victim of forced assimilation, one of many Indigenous children to suffer the same fate. She and her siblings were removed from their mother because she took a job at a steel plant to support them when their father left. The children were separated and bounced between orphanages and foster homes, and experienced neglect and abuse, leaving scars that will never heal. Instead of supporting a single mother to care for her children in a culturally safe and appropriate way, child welfare removed the children and placed them in white foster homes in the name of cultural assimilation, disassociating those children and generations after from their family, home, culture, and support network—disassociating them from their identity as Indigenous peoples.

Now many whose identities were stolen like those in my family have begun to reclaim their identities. The process of picking up the pieces and healing from the traumas is identity work as generations of families and individuals decide what to accept or reject from the identity components imposed by their foster families, residential schools, and from their estranged families (Palmater, 2011). I expected to see evidence of this identity work around ethnicity in this study, as it is pronounced in the current political discourse

(Truth and Reconcilitaion Commission of Canada, 2015) and in the literature on Indigenous Women's experiences (Bingham et al., 2014; Duff et al., 2014; National Inquiry Into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2017).

While ethnicity plays an important role in the literature, and I was sensitive to noticing it because of my own family's experiences, it was not pronounced in this research. Trish was the only participant who felt her ethnicity was relevant in her experiences doing sex work. She acknowledged the white privilege she enjoyed, recognizing that other Women face discrimination because of their work *and* because of their ethnicity, socioeconomic status, addiction, or criminal record. It was surprising to me that in direct contrast to the literature on violence (Deering et al., 2014; National Inquiry Into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2017), child apprehension (Dewey et al., 2018; Duff et al., 2014), and criminal justice (specifically sex work and drug charges) (Davies, 2015), all areas where Indigenous women and Indigenous Women are overrepresented, none of the three participants who self-identified as Métis attributed any of those particular or other experiences they had to their ethnicity. This may be because only one of them could be described as visibly Indigenous. As someone who identifies as, but does not appear Indigenous, I am aware that racism is often targeted at those who are visibly outside the dominant ethnic group. Alternatively, it could be that these three participants were simply unwilling to acknowledge the ways in which their ethnicity influenced their experiences. This could be a form of protecting themselves as agents, rather than admitting that they were affected by racism.

Reconciling identity components. Participants' own feelings about their work and other components of their identities were undoubtedly influenced by external sources. However, the process of choosing what to internalize and reinforce to come to an

understanding of their different identities is the active portion of identity construction (Orchard et al., 2013; Smith, 2017). This process continued to evolve as participants gained new insights and understandings of themselves, and as they took on new roles.

For example, Trish talked about how she sometimes did not feel legitimate as a Woman because the message she understood from society was that Women are exploited and exploitative, home-wreckers, whores, and sluts who have poor social supports, no real health care or choice, and are isolated and ashamed. She did not identify with those labels and instead acknowledged her own white privilege, how she came from an upper-middle class background, was educated, and has always had access to opportunity and resources. That incongruence, and the fact that her webcam work was safer than other sex work because she had no physical contact with clients, sometimes made her feel like she did not know what it was like to do real sex work. Though she did identify as a Woman, she admitted to sometimes having trouble reconciling what she understood from society with her own experience and her own feelings about her work, which is an experience shared by other Women in her socioeconomic position and with similarly high social capital (Heineman, 2016).

It was not only those who lived and worked outside of sex work who projected stigma on participants, but also participants themselves who projected stigma onto fellow workers. Each participant in some way distanced herself from other Women deemed beneath her by clarifying that she would not work in a certain location (Trish would not do outdoor work), provide certain services (Isobel would not do intimate kissing, Nellie would not do sex without a condom), or engage in certain behaviours (Andrea would not steal from clients, Nicole would not lower prices). By redirecting onto others the stigma that society places on them, they reinforced the stratification within sex work,

perpetuating the stigma surrounding it and further marginalizing those at the bottom of the hierarchy (Bouclin, 2006; Shaver et al., 2011). In her work with dancers in an exotic dance club, Bouclin (2006) found that participants separated themselves—exotic dancers as artists from lap dancers as Women. This analysis highlighted the relative social mobility that these women possessed due to the intersections of age, ethnicity, ability, and type of work. As participants in this research leveraged aspects of social stigmas for their own benefit, not only were they deflecting the stigma that society imposed on them onto others, they were also constructing an aspect of their own sex work identity in relation to others (McLean, 2012).

Orchard et al. (2013) described how different identities could be conflicting, reflecting contradictory feelings about different selves; for example, "the good junkie" who did not use too much and functioned as a parent, and "the bad junkie" who was not able to resist drugs and needed help. Participants in my research also utilized different, sometimes contradictory identities for different situations. For example, Andrea felt sex work was fun and glamorous while she worked. She enjoyed the party and carried on, pushed by the need to buy drugs. Even after two significant assaults, she would not let herself acknowledge the dangers in her work because to do so would be to re-examine her drug use and she was not able to do so at that time. In order to focus on the fun and not the danger she constructed a carefree identity that allowed her not to worry about the dangers she faced. When she spoke about the lifestyle now that she was out, her former-sex-worker identity was decidedly different. As someone no longer engaged in sex work, she saw the trade as dangerous and something she would never engage in again now that she no longer needed money for drugs. Her identity was that of someone who had escaped her former lifestyle.

Jenn also showed conflicting emotions when she talked about the labels slut, whore, and skank that came from her parents and brother and were meant to describe her as a person because she did sex work. She chose to reject those notions, refusing to incorporate them into her self-identity. However, at other times she talked about not wanting to be the type of person who does sex work, saying that she was better than that kind of person. This showed that despite her resistance, the names her family called her have in some ways been internalized. She was able to resist the labels as describing herself as a person, but incorporated them into her idea of a Woman, leading to role conflict. The ability to separate work identity from home identity is important in highly stigmatized work such as sex work, because it removes the self-identity from the harmful labels that may be attached to the work identity (Abel, 2011). Jenn experienced role conflict because she deflected the negative labels from her family from her self-identity onto her understanding of the act of doing sex work. However, because she continued to do sex work, and had difficulty separating her home identity from her work identity, she found herself associated with a sex work identity that had negative connotations.

Performing Identities

Judith Butler (1999) described identity as fluid, produced within interactions with others and with one's environment. Identities are constantly being co-constructed and enacted, and they vary according to time and place. She explained how the repeated enactment of an identity serves to constitute that identity—a process called performativity (Butler, 1999; Youngblood Jackson, 2004). I have substituted the word identity where she talked about *the subject* to make clear the relevance to my research.

Butler's (1999) notion of performativity and its constitutive nature can be used to understand participants' enactment of their sex work identity, and how through the repeated performance of that identity, they came to embody the identity itself. Some participants referred to the glamour they saw in sex work as part of the initial draw. Andrea and Isobel particularly remembered being drawn to the fancy clothes, getting dressed up, flirting, and making a lot of money. This was how they understood sex work and so they performed it in their own work as Women, and at least for a time, they embodied the glamour of sex work.

Choosing identities. Some participants described their work identity as decidedly different than their home persona. Darlene, Nicole, and Nellie were all strong and outspoken women in their home-identities, but portrayed a much more timid and soft character for their work. Trish, on the other hand, felt free to be bolder and outspoken while on camera, and Nicole offered spanking and pegging (using a strap-on penis to have sex with a man) as part of a dominating character. The identities they performed were not chosen at random, and participants were not simply conforming to certain stereotypes; instead those identities represented "a calculated response made by Women to capitalize on their own sexuality and the cultural ideals of the client" (Sanders, 2005, p. 323).

Moving between identities. Trish used her photos to describe the transformation she made when moving between her home identity and her work identity. She did webcam work from her bedroom, and in order to move between the two worlds, she participated in a ritual including the take down of personal items in her room (turning over a photo of her family, moving other objects away) and set up of work items (setting up her camera, taking out her lubrication and sex toys). She also had a ritual of getting

herself ready (donning clothes specific to work, applying make-up in a way she does not do in her life outside work). That ritual of preparing herself and her workspace allowed her to move between those different identities. Nellie, Isobel, and Darlene all talked about the ritual of showering, wearing different clothes and different make-up, using a different name, and using a condom (which they did not with their partners), as demarcating their work identity and helping them move out of the performance of one role and into another. Their actions are consistent with the literature on using rituals to move between identities (Abel, 2011; Handlovsky et al., 2012; Jackson et al., 2005; Sanders, 2005; Syvertsen et al., 2015).

Participants actively created an identity specific to their role as Women by choosing what to accept or reject from identity components imposed on them by others in their lives and by society, thereby constructing an identity that suited their needs and fit with their understanding of the role. Participants maintained separation between their role as Women and the other roles they play in their private lives for their own emotional health, to protect others in their personal lives, and to reconcile incongruences between seemingly incompatible roles.

Boundaries Control Intimacy: "You Actually Have to Physically and Emotionally Attach Yourself to a Human and then Detach Yourself Immediately After"

This theme describes how participants negotiated their role in interactions with clients. Some avoided intimacy entirely and restricted their interactions with clients to strictly physical. Others were comfortable and even enjoyed allowing some intimacy with certain clients. Even those interactions, however, were controlled according to the participant's comfort level on a scale from isolation to intimacy. Participants used various tools to achieve control in client interactions. Those included drugs and alcohol as well as

a mental safe space that allowed participants to avoid intimacy with clients. Other participants allowed a degree of intimacy, but immediately disengaged after a date to maintain their boundaries, and still others used deep acting in order to allow some intimacy while remaining emotionally safe.

Isolation and Intimacy in Sex Work

Isolation and intimacy are both inherent to sex work. Every participant talked about either the physical or the emotional isolation that they felt because of their work, which is reinforced by the abundance of literature on the subject (Jackson et al., 2009; Murphy et al., 2015; Shdaimah & Leon, 2016). Physical isolation occurs more for those who do private escort, escort agency, or webcam work because they work alone (although escort agency workers often have a driver/body guard) (McLean, 2012). Some authors noted the relationships formed among outdoor workers and the safety that comes from working around other people on an established strip (Shdaimah & Leon, 2016), but other scholars described outdoor work as lonely and that despite the presence of others who were working, community pressure to relegate sex work to the unseen and policing practices to move sex work away from public areas resulted in isolation (Krüsi et al., 2016; Lyons, Krüsi, Pierre, et al., 2017). Those Women who work in massage parlours experience the least isolation, but working alongside others does not guarantee personal connections. Emotional isolation is less work-space specific and is tied to the presence or absence of someone to confide in, particularly someone who understands the business. Unsurprisingly, Women with better support systems experience less isolation (Koken, 2012).

Sex work also requires some level of intimacy, and participants discussed the ways they allowed intimacy and dictated the bounds of a specific interaction based on

their comfort level and needs. Participants' interactions with clients can be understood as occurring on a scale of isolation to intimacy, with participants controlling the depth of each interaction on that scale.

Why control intimacy in sex work?

Women are required to portray a number of things they may not actually feel, including sexiness, interest in a person, arousal, and sexual gratification (Abel, 2011; Pinsky & Levey, 2015). Work that requires management of an individual's actual feelings and the portrayal of different ones is called emotion labour. This occurs when an individual works with the public and is required to make meaning and manage emotion. Common examples from the literature include restaurant servers, flight attendants, counsellors, and Women (Abel, 2011; Hochschild, 1979). Emotion work, such as sex work, requires a sustained emotional effort, and therefore can be draining (Murphy et al., 2015).

I attended a sex work conference in 2010 and one of the sessions was on self-care for individuals who sell sex. The speaker identified the emotional burden that those individuals can experience when they take on a client's negative energy and emotions during a sex encounter. He talked about this risk as unavoidable and proposed a self-care routine in order to release those emotions and energy as crucial to wellbeing (*Conference session*, 2010).

In the previous chapter I described the various ways in which participants sought grounding and balance, including art, reading, exercise, and support from partners. It was a topic that was addressed by all participants, highlighting its significance in maintaining wellness in their lives. Darlene spoke about the importance of such strategies when she had a particularly difficult interaction at work, saying that sometimes she would come

home, curl up with her partner, and cry. Nellie also pushed her partner to talk with her about her work because she needed to confide in him about her encounters. She also used her art to calm her when she was feeling dope sick and anxious, waiting for someone to answer her online ad.

Tools for controlling intimacy in sex work

When and how deeply participants connected with their clients was specific to time and place and unique to each encounter. Participants made decisions to control the depth of each interaction according to their comfort level, needs, and skills (Abel, 2011; Ditmore, Levy, & Willman, 2010; Murphy et al., 2015). Specific to their engagement with clients, some participants used techniques such as substance use and mental disengagement to avoid intimacy completely and restrict client interactions to the physical. Others did not avoid intimacy but allowed it to a degree with which they were comfortable, by engaging and then disengaging, and by deep acting.

Like many Women described in the literature (Syvertsen et al., 2013), Isobel Andrea, Jenn, and Nicole used drugs and alcohol to avoid intimacy with dates. Isobel retreated to a safe mental space when she was with clients, in order to avoid the intimacy of making a personal connection with them. This strategy has also been observed by other researchers (Abel, 2011). These four participants kept their work encounters at a level far from intimate, in order to protect themselves from the vulnerability that comes with emotionally engaging.

Darlene, on the other hand, was comfortable with a level of intimacy with some of her clients. She described the process of actively connecting to a client during a date and then disconnecting immediately afterward, and discussed it as a crucial skill for her work. She did not allow the same level of intimacy with each client; she made her decisions

based on how safe she felt and her interest in the person. She identified the connections she made as one aspect of her work that she enjoyed. Trish and Nicole echoed Darlene's sentiments of enjoying the opportunity to make connections with clients in their work, which is one of the commonly cited benefits of sex work (Jones, 2016; Tewksbury & Lapsey, 2017). This does not mean, however, that they completely opened up with clients as they did with others in their lives. The process they used in order to manage their own emotions and give their clients the "bounded authenticity" (Bernstein, 2007), or genuine experience they were looking for, is called deep acting (Abel, 2011; Sanders, 2005).

Deep acting to control intimacy. Deep acting is a technique explained by Hochschild (1983) in her work with flight attendants. Their work can be characterized as emotion labour, which sometimes requires suppressing their own feelings about a client or situation to provide the level of customer satisfaction demanded by their role. Instead of pretending to feel a certain way (i.e., sympathy for an irate passenger), the worker instead invokes a real emotion that is appropriate to the situation (i.e., making him/herself feel empathy by imagining that the passenger suffers from anxiety when flying), lending authenticity to the client or customer's experience. This technique can be applied to others, such as Women, who also perform emotional labour (Abel, 2011; Sanders, 2005).

The skill of deep acting can provide important emotional distance from an individual's work self, helping to manage the actor's own emotions (Abel, 2011; Hochschild, 1983; Murphy et al., 2015). Trish discussed the importance of getting into character and how if she was not able to do that completely, she felt unable to work. Deep acting can be a source of pride because it makes the actor better at her job by ensuring a more genuine experience for the client (Hochschild, 1983). Nellie talked about her

strength in performance as her most important work skill, as that determines the client's satisfaction even more than sexual skill.

Deep acting can also be liberating in allowing the actor to personify a different identity (Sanders, 2005). Trish found the vulnerability of being naked on camera performing a stigmatized role freeing in that she could do nothing that would make her more susceptible to judgment than she already was. She consequently felt able to be more direct and straightforward in performing her sex work identity than she was in performing her other identities where there was a possibility of failure or judgment.

In sex work, deep acting can also be a form of stigma resistance, as workers are able to shed their sex work identity when they are not working and don an identity that is socially normative, thus avoiding the stigma associated with their work (Abel, 2011). Though all of the participants in this research disclosed their sex work status to select people, they all chose to keep their work from most people in their lives. Even Darlene, Trish, Nellie, Nicole, and Isobel, who felt comfortable in their work and what it provided for their lives, chose to generally avoid the stigma that surrounds their work.

Through the course of this research I learned that I also use deep acting in my own work. As a nurse working with Women and now in addictions, I spend a lot of time listening to very difficult stories—assault and death are not uncommon topics of conversation during my workday. I recognized early on that a skill that I brought to my work was the ability to listen empathetically but also avoid taking on my patients' pain or bringing it back to my home life. My work is emotion labour. I must show patients empathy and non-judgmental understanding. I do not pretend these emotions; I feel them, even when listening to a story where my home self might feel differently. I also must actively empathize and share my patient's pain, and then protect myself by letting it go

and not bringing it home with me. To be authentic with my patients, I put on my nurse identity while at work. My nurse identity feels those feelings for her patients. After work I step back into my home identity, and in doing so I am able to let go of the pain and suffering I hear throughout my day.

Risks of deep acting. Though it can be emotionally protective, deep acting is not an entirely benign process for the actor. Hochschild (1983) detailed three categories of risk for those who utilize the technique. The first is the individual who identifies completely with the work, risking burnout in her/his complete submergence in the role. The second is the individual who separates her/himself from the work, avoiding burnout, but suffering from guilt for that very separation. This person may see her/himself as fake or disingenuous and may grow to resent the work for requiring such falsity. The third is the individual who separates her/himself from the work, does not feel guilty about the separation, and recognizes that the work requires skill in acting. This individual avoids burnout and guilt, but may also become estranged from and perhaps resentful of the acting.

Participants in my research portrayed examples of all three of the risk categories. Though this work was not the only work Trish did, and she felt strongly that it was only one piece of her identity, she submerged herself completely while she worked. She spoke about herself as a genuine person and felt that truthfulness was a skill that made her good at her job. This complete engagement, however, has led to burnout in the past, and Trish would sometimes go for months without working because she felt unable to engage at that high emotional level. It was difficult for her to balance the level of sincerity she demanded of herself, with the separation that could help avoid burnout.

Darlene maintained separation between her work and private life. She spoke at great length about the importance of setting boundaries and disengaging from her interactions with clients for the sake of harmony in her private life. She maintained this separation to avoid the burnout she knew would come otherwise, but she also occasionally felt guilty about it. She spoke about her interactions with clients where she acted as a friend to them, and genuinely meant what she said when they were together; but also felt guilty because she was accepting money to perform that role, which felt disingenuous to her.

Nellie discussed disassociation from the acting part of the job. She represented Hochschild's (1983) third category of risk because she separated her work and private life and did not feel guilt about it because she understood it to be necessary to her own wellness. She recognized that acting was a skill required of her work, and even that she exceled at it, but that excellence was the very source of her discomfort. She did not want to have to act in her work. She spoke about herself as a straightforward and genuine person in her private life, and resented the necessary acting in her job.

Hochschild (1983) suggested that having more control in the workplace might ameliorate some of the burnout, guilt, and disassociation; however, Trish, Darlene, and Nellie, those participants in this research who experienced burnout, guilt, and disassociation, also reported the highest levels of control in their workplace. They underscored their need for grounding in order to ameliorate these risks. Grounding techniques such as artwork, exercise, and connections with their partners were also discussed by the other participants who used different strategies for controlling the amount of intimacy they allowed in their interactions with clients.

This theme describes participants' interactions with their clients, and how they controlled the level of intimacy they allowed. Some avoided it entirely by using drugs and alcohol, or through emotional disengagement. Others allowed a certain level of intimacy, using deep acting to provide their clients with the bounded intimacy they desired. Participants did experience some negative effects of deep acting, but they used grounding techniques to ameliorate these risks. Participants who talked about having more control over workplace decisions, and talked the most about being satisfied with their work, also felt comfortable allowing some intimacy with their clients, and controlling the level of intimacy through deep acting.

Enacting Agency: "For Now I Will Do This Job Because I Can. Fuck It"

With the final theme I explore how participants enacted agency within the structural barriers that served to constrain them. Much of the literature on sex work in Canada focuses either on the detrimental effect of social structures on Women's realities, or on how Women challenge those structures in agential acts of defiance. In my research, the interplay between structure and agency was more nuanced. Participants discussed some of the structures that they felt affected their lives, such as social programs and services (including the criminal justice, child welfare, and social service systems), sex work laws, stigma, and violence. Despite the undeniable effects of these structures on their lives, and despite the ways that the varying intersections of gender, age, class, and social capital constrained their choices, participants chose to tell their stories from an agency perspective. Even when they were talking about times when they had very little control over a situation, like assault or arrest, their stories always focused on the decisions they made and the actions they took, rather than what was done to them.

A More Nuanced Understanding

Participants in this research enacted agency in order to operate within certain social structures, hindered or helped by their unique intersections of race, gender, age, class, social capital, and ability. Intersectionality has been applied to research on sex work before. In her critique of an erotic dancers' association in Ottawa, Bouclin (2006) examined participants' experiences as members of the association, with a critical analysis of the particular intersections of race, class, sexual orientation, and ability. Her application of the concept of intersectionality allowed for deeper insight to be drawn into the complexities of the spaces these women occupied in positions of both privilege (as young, Caucasian, and able-bodied women) and disadvantage (marginalized by working in an occupation that carries stigma).

Importantly, and as much of the literature on structure and agency in sex work misses, they did so within and as part of those structures, not in spite of them. In her work on the performance of gender, Butler (1988, p. 530) suggested that in the day-to-day performance of the self, one reinforces social structures by performing within the constraints of "socially shared and historically constituted" acts. She maintains this even when the very performance is an act of defiance of those structures. By performing within them, a person reinforces her presence and therefore her validity (Butler, 1988).

Working Within Social Programs and Services

After an injury and workplace sexual harassment left her without a job, Nicole turned to social services for support and was given inadequate help. She then turned to sex work, the best option she felt she had to pay rent and buy groceries for herself and her son. The result was that her ex-husband was able to cite sex work as evidence that she was unfit to care for her child. When the social welfare system failed her she defied it, but

that defiance was used to support the fact that she was an unfit mother (as defined within that structure) who was unable to support her child and who engaged in illegal activities incongruent with those of a good mother. Nicole's experience is not uncommon (Bromwich & DeJong, 2015; Dewey et al., 2018). This exclusion may have solidified her erasure from "valued forms of social and community life" (Dewey et al., 2018, p. 46) because it resulted in the escalation of her drug use and sex work. However, despite that loss, Nicole continued to act as a mother to homeless youth. Motherhood remained an important identity for her, and she retained ownership of it, exercising her power to take back some of the identity that was taken from her.

Isobel's mother largely raised her older children while she served a lengthy prison sentence. She felt robbed of the chance to raise her children and guilty about what her drug use and prison time meant for the quality of her parenting once she was released and resumed responsibility for their care. Those children are grown and independent now, but she has had another opportunity to raise her two younger children, and she discussed using drug treatment in order to try to stay off drugs and out of legal trouble. She worried that child protective services might come to take her children, especially as she did sex work when her two other jobs did not cover expenses. However, her own as well as Nicole, Darlene, and Nellie's choices to do sex work rather than rely on EI or similar programs (even if the decision was made in Nicole's case because the services offered were inadequate) can be seen as an action resisting their submission as powerless subjects. There is a growing body of literature that recognizes the agency that is necessarily involved in choosing sex work, even when the options are limited and some may argue that there was no other choice (Benoit et al., 2017; Jeffrey & MacDonald, 2006). These women exercised their power to choose to do sex work.

Isobel's experience in the criminal justice system gave her a critical view of its effectiveness. In relation to sex work and drug use particularly, she saw the system as harmful to Women who struggle with addiction. Targeting clients and making the sale of sex difficult forces Women instead to sell drugs to make the money they need to not be sick. She saw incarceration and forced drug treatment programs as ineffective, as her own experience as well as that of others she knew was cyclical: using drugs, selling sex to pay for the drugs, resorting to crime when sex work was made difficult by law enforcement that targeted clients and made them scarce, being put in jail because she was doing crime, being released, and going back to drug use. She claimed that it was not until she participated in behavioural therapy sessions that she changed this cycle. Despite the efforts at forced change by the structure of the criminal justice system, Isobel continued to perform the role that had supported her in the past and that allowed her to survive neglect, abandonment, poverty, and abuse. It was not until she saw a need for change and learned the tools to enact that change (within the structure of the criminal justice system) that she enacted her own agency to make the change for herself.

Managing Stigma

Stigma is a common theme in sex work literature and participants in this research were not immune. Stigma was defined in Chapter Two as the feeling of rejection that results from being outcast by society for behaving or being outside of social norms (Goffman, 1963; Mill, 2003). Women face stigma in society because they are seen as actively destroying dominant expectations of monogamy. If they say they choose this work, as did all of the participants in this research, they defy the reduction of "prostitutes" as necessarily victims of male violence toward women (Benoit et al., 2017; Berg, 2014; Comte, 2014). This stigma is compounded for those who fall outside of the norms in

multiple ways, like ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender. In my opinion, in this research only Andrea could be described as a visible minority. Only Darlene and Trish discussed having sex with other women in their private lives, and only Darlene in her work life as well. However, in contrast to the literature (Deering et al., 2014), none of those three attributed any of the stigma or negative experiences they faced to their ethnicity or sexual orientation. Trish recognized the privilege she experienced as a white, upper-middle class person, and Darlene capitalized on her sexual orientation (Sanders, 2005). All of the participants identified as women, who are the dominant group in this profession and therefore face less stigma than those of other gender expressions (Lyons, Krüsi, Leslie, et al., 2017). All were able-bodied and thus did not struggle to find work in that regard (Fritsch et al., 2016).

Age, class, and social capital were the only identity points raised by participants as negatively affecting their experiences. At 45 years of age, Nicole felt unable to do stripping and exotic dancing as she once did, though in her online advertisements she lied and said she was younger than she actually was. Nellie was 37 and though she still worked as she always had, she felt the pressure of trying to compete with younger girls who were thin and fit. Nellie and Isobel both started doing sex work at thirteen, when they were unable to do other work legally and so had fewer options.

The social construct of class describes an individual's socioeconomic position as well as the education, status, and opportunity that are afforded accordingly (Bernstein, 2007). Trish described her upbringing as upper-middle class, but all of the other participants in this research came from homes with less money and abuse or neglect. Some, like Nellie, Darlene, Andrea, and Isobel made a direct connection with their troubled upbringing and their eventual sex work. Nellie felt the sexual abuse by her father

allowed her to be able to do sex work easily because in her words, she was already broken. Darlene expressed her opinion that most people who are drawn to sex work have some sort of difficult past. These participants' ages and class predisposed them to stigma layered on top of the stigma they faced as Women.

Stigma came from individuals in participants' lives and from society in general. Nicole's children were removed from her care because it was assumed that she could not possibly be a good mother while doing sex work. Isobel lived in fear of the same. Jenn's family berated her for her work, calling her names and insinuating she was bad and dirty because she did sex work. Trish described the stigma she felt from society about her work, and from other Women because she felt her work was not as legitimate as theirs. All of the participants deflected the stigma they felt from society onto others in the trade. Such horizontal violence is a common tactic of stigma resistance (Bouclin, 2006; Koken, 2012; Morrison & Whitehead, 2005). They carefully distanced themselves from others who perform certain services or work in certain locations, to maintain a relatively high social position.

In her work with independent escorts, Koken (2012) found that those who disclose to select people about their work are better supported to manage the stigma associated with it than are those who tell no one. In Vancouver I worked with Women who had told no one in their lives outside of their work. Most of these women worked in massage parlours and were first-generation immigrants. They had come to Canada looking for a better life for their families, but when they found they were unable to make ends meet they sought income the only way they felt able to, by turning to sex work. These women had husbands and children at home who knew nothing about their work, and they made up stories for their families to protect them from the stigma surrounding it. Their secret

work life was a heavy burden, but their reliance on their co-workers to debrief and share with was crucial to their mental wellbeing. All of the participants in this research selectively disclosed about their work, which they felt as necessary in managing their stress. While they spoke about isolation and stigma, they also talked about the positive impact of having someone they could talk to.

Living With Violence

Violence was discussed in Chapter Two as a tool for asserting dominance as part of a larger power structure (Crenshaw, 1991). Power is generally tilted in favour of the dominant group, and those who fall outside of that group in their identities of gender or ethnicity, or those whose actions fall outside of social norms, like Women or those who use illegal drugs, face violence at a greater rate than those within the dominant group (Deering et al., 2014; National Inquiry Into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2017). Socioeconomic factors such as outdoor sex work, homelessness, and difficulty accessing drug treatment have been associated with increased risk of violence for Women (Deering et al., 2014). Similarly, interactions with police like confiscation of drug paraphernalia, or being moved by police out of main areas has also been shown to be associated with increased violence (Deering et al., 2014; Shannon et al., 2009). These additional exposures to violence applied to all of the participants except Trish; every other participant in this research talked about experiencing violence at one time in either in their work or private life.

All of the participants except Trish, Jenn, and Darlene struggled with addiction to drugs at some point in their working lives. Isobelle and Andrea specifically talked about drug arrests, and Isobel about how drug treatment programs were ineffective. Andrea, Isobel and Nicole all worked outdoors at some point in their careers. All except Andrea

and Trish experienced periods of homelessness. Jenn and Nellie talked about exchanging sex for shelter, Darlene, Isobel and Nicole about doing sex work specifically to enable them to pay rent. Andrea, Isobel and Nicole all talked about having drug paraphernalia confiscated or being moved out of main areas (Isobel's experience was outside Lethbridge). All of the participants except Trish experienced violence at some point, though Nellie reported that the violence in her life was exclusive to her childhood before sex work. Almost every participant experienced social conditions that put her at greater risk of experiencing violence because she found herself outside of the dominant group in her decision to engage in sex work orher drug use or poverty.

Invisible violence. In addition to physical violence, Bourgois (2010, p. 19) built on Pierre Bourdieu's (1992) concept of symbolic violence where dominated groups "naturalize the status quo and blame themselves for their domination." He described the process of invisible violence, which includes: structural violence where the political and economic forces and unequal access to resources and services limit opportunity; symbolic violence where the resulting stratification becomes internalized by all parties as natural and deserved; and finally normalized violence where practices, discourse and cultural values result in social indifference and render this violence invisible (Bourgois, 2010, p. 19). The examples from the literature above represent structural violence where social constructs of race, gender, socioeconomic factors, and action by social institutions like police result in unequal access to resources and services and limited opportunity for those Women most marginalized.

Andrea described two brutal assaults by clients, and Jenn by her boyfriend and pimp. Andrea explains that the first happened when she tried to steal money from a client after a date. She did that periodically at the time, to support her drug use and for the thrill.

It is something she now looks unfavourably on. At the time the client caught her and got angry and threatened to beat her up and throw her in the river. He beat her quite badly but she left without any life threatening injuries and went home without seeking medical attention, continuing to work as soon as she was able. The second time she does not know why it happened. She picked up a client and left the friend she had been working with to do the date. The client took her to a back alley and beat her severely. She was somehow able to make her way back to her friend, who was unable to recognize her face because it was so swollen. Someone called emergency medical services but she refused to go to the hospital, and instead let her friend nurse her back to health. Jenn described in chapter four how her physically and emotionally abusive boyfriend and pimp kept her in his room using verbal threats. He forced himself and his friends on her, and made her do dates where he gradually stopped sharing the profits with her. He made her do a "gang bang" which resulted in multiple and ongoing injuries for her. Darlene admitted to experiencing violence in the past but declined to elaborate.

Andrea did not feel her ethnicity had any role in the incidents, but the literature (Larter, 2011; Strega et al., 2014) suggests that her status as a Woman and a drug user made her a safe target as someone who likely would not report to authorities or receive their help (which she did not), and who is disposable as a nuisance in society. Consistent with much of the literature on the safety and accessibility of services for Women, Jenn and Darlene similarly had little recourse to access medical help from a non-judgmental healthcare system, where Women continue to experience stigma and victim blaming from those in a position to provide them with care (Bungay et al., 2013; Hubbard & Prior, 2013). This judgment makes them much less likely to access healthcare services, which Andrea and Darlene did not. Similarly, stigma and judgement, as well as fear of arrest for

sex work or drugs maintains the impenetrable "blue ceiling" (Benoit et al., 2016, p. 456) that holds police services inaccessible for those working in the sex trade because of the legal status of their work (Benoit et al., 2016; Krüsi et al., 2016). Only Jenn says that she had ever or would ever report a bad date to police. All the other participants would prefer to suffer in silence rather than risk what they see as inevitable poor treatment or arrest.

Andrea and Jenn both internalized their experiences as a natural consequence of sex work. They spoke about violence as something to be expected for Women. It is part of what motivates them to stay away from sex work, though Jenn still finds herself "taking that risk" when she needs money or something else. Darlene, Isobel, and Nicole also talked about the potential violence to which Women are exposed as something to be expected and therefore something they had to take responsibility for preventing. Not only have these three women's sex work identities been impacted by society telling them how they should feel about their work, but they are also being told by society how they should physically experience it. The three of them internalized the violence they experienced as inevitable, echoing the media and society's discourse (Janzen et al., 2013; Larter, 2011), adding the invisible violence of the system that naturalizes their own inevitable victimization (Bourgois, 2010), to their experiences of physical violence.

One can return to Butler (1988) in the face of such bleak inevitability. In speaking about gender as a performative act, she explained that the actor may forget that they are acting and instead identify wholly with the performance, succumbing to the inevitability of what the role entails—in this case the powerlessness, stigma, and violence that these participants sometimes experienced as Women. Conversely, in the recognition that one is performing, the actor may choose to perform an alternative identity, subverting the system of invisible violence by his/her refusal to partake in it (Butler, 1988). This is not to

say that a failed attempt at resistance, a failure to resist at all times, or the continuance of the power structures are in any way a fault of the actor, as can sometimes be assumed in agency discourse. Social structures are powerful in part because everyone involved continually reinforces them, and they are not easily overthrown. However, small acts that defy participation in and therefore the perpetuation of those structures can contribute to individual triumphs. These participants did this on a daily basis in the decisions that they made about how they ran their businesses—defying systemic violence by choosing to work indoors for safety, or with an escort agency because of the security personnel, or choosing to solicit online rather than outdoors. They defied social isolation and stigma in the intimacy they allowed with their clients and others in their lives, the continuation of their work, the disclosure of that work to others, and how they performed their various identities, Woman and otherwise, in ways that worked for their lives.

In this final theme I explored the nuanced interplay of structure and agency. Participants performed their roles as Women, mothers, and partners within and as part of the social structures that surrounded them. Their performance of their roles within those systems played a part in reinforcing and sometimes defying those structures. Social structures that participants discussed as negatively affecting their experiences included child protective services through child apprehension, inadequate financial assistance to meet basic needs for food and shelter from EI, and arrest and incarceration without actual rehabilitative support from the criminal justice system. They also discussed the impact of stigma and violence on their lives, including the invisible violence that serves to limit opportunity, especially for those who fall outside of social norms, and causes the inequality to become internalized by all players and therefore normalized as the natural order. Participants play a role in this process along with the rest of society, reinforcing the

structures with their performances within them—until they revolt, in small acts of defiance of these social structures, by enacting agency.

Photovoice in this Research

I made a choice to use photovoice for this research because my intent for the project was political. Though I had no evidence about the experiences of Women who work in smaller centres, my conversations with local service providers and my own knowledge of the city led me to believe that Women who work in Lethbridge may lack support services and experience stigma. I anticipated that participants would share about the need for some sort of change, and thus I sought a tool that could communicate their message for change.

Photovoice is ideally suited for research such as this, where participants come from groups traditionally silenced. It offers a chance for them to be "seen" through their art, and their voices heard, which humanizes them and helps to reduce stigma (Capous-Desyllas, 2013; Oliveira, 2018; Rumpf, 2017). It fit with my aim of including participants as collaborators as much as possible in the research process, rather than simply as research subjects—"Nothing about us, without us!" This upset of the traditional power imbalance was important to me. Photovoice gives participants control of what to photograph, therefore directing the conversation and choosing the message they want to convey and the story they want to share (Capous-Desyllas, 2014; Shankar, 2016). Not only was this important to me ideologically, it is also well suited to a descriptive exploratory methodology where little is known about the experiences of Women working in smaller centres such as Lethbridge. Because there is very little literature on the subject, participants were best positioned to inform me of what they felt was important to share.

This approach also fit well with feminist standpoint theory, in that it respects participants as experts, best informed to understand both their own as well as the dominant groups' position.

In addition to an important ideological shift, photovoice has the potential to provide particularly rich data. The process of setting up and taking a photo can elicit strong emotion in a participant. The time between taking the photo and the interview allows space for reflection and insight. Then, the photovoice interview involves an examination of the photo, including a retelling about the photo subject matter and about the process of taking the photo. This can bring together that emotion and depth to offer insights into entirely new ideas and thoughts that may not have come about without creating the art and taking time to reflect on it (Rumpf, 2017).

There is an important role for the researcher in this process as well. The participant makes artistic decisions about what to convey by deciding what to include in the frame. However, it can be important to ask questions about what was left outside the frame as well. Sometimes this has significance to the analysis (Oliveira, 2018; Shankar, 2016). For example, Isobel's photo "Freedom and the smell of green" was about the simple happiness she felt while on a road trip with her daughters. She explained that she was not entirely sure why she had taken it, she just felt happy and free driving out of town, and she wanted to stop and take a moment to share it with them. She mentioned that she took some deep breaths and revelled in the smell of green. I asked her to tell me more about the smell and it meant for her. She was not entirely sure at first; she simply said she liked the smell of green. Then she started contrasting that smell, and later that place with her life working on the streets. She visibly shuddered when describing the

stifling smells of cement, car exhaust, dirt and urine on the street. This photo represented the antithesis of all of that for her, an escape from that life, even if only temporarily, in order to ground and balance herself.

Participating in arts-based research such as photovoice can have direct benefits for participants. Andrea described the process of participating in this research as cathartic for her. She felt she had some unresolved feelings tied to her time doing sex work. She was excited about the chance to explore those feelings and let them go. She reported after the final photovoice interview that she felt she had done some healing work by revisiting her past from an outside perspective, and that it felt good to be able to look at that time critically and then let it go and move forward. Trish also described her enjoyment and benefit from participating in the research. She said that the process of creating her art offered her new insights into herself and her feelings about her work.

I feel that photovoice was a good fit for this project. Ideologically it fit with my aims, and with the methodology and theoretical framework of the research design. It offered rich data with depth and insight, and provided benefits identified by several participants. At the end I am left with powerful visual images which I intend to exhibit to targeted stakeholders as well as the general public (see plans for KTE below), and my hope is that at the least minds will be opened to the complexity of these participants beyond their work, decreasing stigma, and at the most, perhaps some changes to service provision will result.

Recommendations

Before beginning this research I met with individuals from several social service organizations. The services they offer focus on harm reduction, especially for those most

marginalized. They offer emergency shelter and housing support, condoms, lubrication, needles and other harm reduction equipment, counselling, and a bad date list, and do some outreach to provide food, harm reduction equipment, and emotional and spiritual support. These services are important, and participants have offered their suggestions to improve service provision in Lethbridge. Where appropriate I have also added suggestions from my experience and from the literature. Service Provision

One of the most important recommendations from participants is for a website for local Women. One participant suggested it in an initial interview, and when I used it as an example of participant recommendations to the others, all seven participants were enthusiastic about the idea. As in the rest of Canada, most sex work in Lethbridge happens indoors, so many of these workers are not aware of, or accessing services from, the agencies that offer such services. Some have suggested this website could have a forum where Women could "meet" each other, ask questions, get advice, and address issues pertinent to their work. This could also be a platform for linking Women to local resources, bad date sheets, and wider literature and information on sex work, to support powerful knowledge for Women. I would also suggest collaboration with local Legal Aid to inform Women of their rights under current federal laws. In my experience in Vancouver as well as with this research, Women could benefit from accessible information about what the laws mean and about their rights. Confusion about the laws and their meaning is common in sex work, which can lead to individuals making dangerous choices in an effort to protect themselves (Corriveau & Greco, 2014). Two of the participants in this research said they would like accessible information about the laws and their rights. All of the participants agreed that they would like to see such a service

and welcomed the chance to connect with each other in the privacy offered online. This could be run through one of the existing agencies to ensure information is kept current, confidential, and anonymous.

Although there is a bad date list kept by one of the service organizations, none of the participants in this research knew about it. Participants would like to see online and paper bad date sheets distributed widely. Effective distribution and accessible reporting would require simple online (possibly from the website described above) and multiple in-person locations to report a bad date. Staff at agencies offering bad date reporting would need to be trained to deal with trauma victims and how to access local services (training which many staff at local service agencies already have), both for their own wellbeing as well as that of the Women.

There is a sexual and reproductive health clinic in Lethbridge; however, most services are limited to those under 25 years of age. This means that Women aged 25 and over must access health services (other than STI screening) with their family physician or at a walk-in clinic. This is insufficient as Women may not feel comfortable telling their physician about their work or need for increased health screening frequency, especially if that person is also their childhood or family's doctor. In this case they may not have adequate health screening, and may not be given appropriate sexual health information, which is a barrier well documented in sex work literature (Lazarus et al., 2012; Roche & Keith, 2014), and that was discussed by the two participants who access health services at the clinic. Expansion of the sexual and reproductive health clinic to include services for individuals of all ages, free contraception, and expanded counselling services to include open and frank discussions about sex work and health and wellness considerations would be beneficial.

Participants would also like to see classes and resources for Women who are transitioning away from drug use or out of the industry, they feel that that this can be a tumultuous time, which is an idea supported in the literature (Rabinovitch, 2003). One participant mentioned services aimed at youth, including preventative classes about the realities of sex work; and for those who are involved in the trade, information, resources, and support on how to work safely and keep themselves well are important in overall safety and wellness (Mehrabadi et al., 2008).

One of the service organizations previously had a drop-in space that was intended for Women. Staff at the agency report that it was not utilized, and suspected that many Women were unaware of its existence. Such spaces have proven very helpful for the most marginalized group of Women (Rabinovitch, 2003). Drop-in centres specifically for Women in larger cities provide information, harm reduction equipment, bad-date reporting, counselling and nursing services, shower and laundry facilities, nutritious food, toiletries, make-up and clothing from donations, and in general a safe space to relax, unwind, and connect. These services as well as the safety offered by the space are important resources for Women who are homeless or who struggle to find space where they can access non-judgmental, non-exit-based services and be comfortable, as living in shelter and emergency housing can be exploitive and unsafe (Lazarus et al., 2011; Rabinovitch, 2003). In order to avoid the problem the local organization encountered with an unused service, word could be spread through extended outreach services (described below), on the website mentioned above, and through other existing services and healthcare agencies. None of the women in this research were aware of the existence of the drop-in space, but three of them discussed how a drop in space of some sort, that was safe and had resources, and people to talk to, would be beneficial for local workers.

Policy

Several participants in this research turned to sex work because they felt they had no other option to support their families, pay for the cost of their addiction, or otherwise meet their needs. This problem is increased for Indigenous, transgender, or openly homosexual people who deal with racism and stigma in hiring practices, for those who have limited education or a criminal record and have difficulty being hired anywhere that pays above minimum wage, or those who live with addictions or mental or physical health problems that prohibit or limit their ability to work (Behrens, 2004; Prasad et al., 2007). For individuals who have limited employment opportunities that pay at least a living wage (according to municipal reports, this is considered to be approximately $14.50/hour in Lethbridge) government services are insufficient to support them. They must either wait for EI or Income Assistance cheques for which they may not qualify and which will likely not cover their needs, or choose to take matters into their own hands and make money in a way they know they can. Four of the participants talked about how they might have made different choices had there been better income assistance to help support them when they needed it, and pay for their needs.

The majority of literature reviewed for this research advocated some level of decriminalization in sex work laws (Comte, 2014; Fritsch et al., 2016; Lewis & Maticka-Tyndale, 2000; O'Doherty, 2011a; van der Meulen, 2011). Global organizations such as Amnesty International (2016), the United Nations Development Programme (2012), and the World Health Organization (2012) echoed this call. Regardless of moral views and the debate about the nature of choice and whether Women actually chose their work or if circumstances dictate those choices, it is clear that the current laws mandate dangerous conditions that only serve to further marginalize, stigmatize, and place workers in danger.

Two of the participants in this research spoke passionately about how their work should no longer be criminalized, and how the laws serve to increase stigma and make their work more dangerous.

When we are open to hearing from Women about what they need from government, we can create policies that serve the interests of everyone involved. New Zealand took such a philosophical stance and worked with a sex worker rights group to craft its decriminalization policies. Though New Zealand's Prostitution Reform Act is not immune from criticism, and stigma still affects those who do sex work in the country (Abel & Fitzgerald, 2012; Bruckert & Hannem, 2013), it is the only federal legislation that was orchestrated with workers themselves, and many researchers and international bodies such as Amnesty International (2016), the United Nations Development Programme (2012), and the WHO (2012) agree that it represents an ideal for which all countries should strive.

For all of the policy and service or service expansions recommended, involvement of those who do sex work in program development is crucial to success—"Nothing about us without us." This thesis has focused on how Women exercise agency within the social barriers that inhibit them, and recognizing Women as individuals who not only *can* but *should* be involved in service and policy decisions that impact them is an important step. This is not easy as those who do sex work, and even Women, are not a homogenous group, but as illustrated by previous legislative reform, services and policies developed for those who engage in sex work instead of with them, are doomed to fail (Bruckert & Hannem, 2013; Sutherland, 2004), so it is time that Women's voices are heard.

Limitations of this Research Study and Directions for Future Research

It is important to remember that Women do not make up a homogenous group. Even in this research with only seven participants, working in four types of work locations in one city, the findings varied considerably. Conclusions about experiences of other Women in Canada, or even within Lethbridge, cannot be made. With that in mind, there are also striking similarities among participants as well as between the findings in this research and in the greater body of literature. While it cannot be said that all Women in Canada will share these experiences, similarities can help guide directions for future research as well as inform services to better support Women.

Participants in this research all identified as women; greater diversity in gender might offer further insights. Because there is little other research from Women in smaller areas in Canada, this research is only a first step in understanding the similarities and differences in experiences of Women working in smaller areas as opposed to those working in larger cities. Future research that looks at smaller and more remote areas would help broaden the picture of Women's experiences in Canada.

This research is descriptive and exploratory and so offers a base for ongoing investigation. It provides a first look the experiences of several Women in Lethbridge to describe their experiences and give them a platform to share their photos and their stories. The three themes that emerged contribute to ideas already present in the larger body of literature on sex worker experiences, indicating some shared experiences. This research also includes some suggestions for practical and policy changes in Lethbridge to better support Women there, which is the piece that corresponds to my question about sex work in smaller areas, specifically Lethbridge. Participants' recommendations including a need for exit resources and support, and drop in services, indicate the lack of sex work-specific

and social service supports in this smaller city. Their suggestion and endorsement for a website to offer information and a platform to connect, supports the notion of the majority of sex work happening indoors, which is the target audience for the website. While the exact ratio of indoor to outdoor work in Lethbridge is unknown, police and service workers that I have spoken to believe the amount of indoor workers to be significantly higher than outdoor, perhaps even higher here than in other cities. This research represents a starting point for other studies to probe deeper into issues raised.

Conclusion

This research began with the desire to understand several Women's experiences in a small urban area and to add to and diversify the larger body of literature on sex work in Canada by including voices from a smaller city. More personally I hoped to engage Women in Lethbridge so that their needs and wants could facilitate the expansion of local service provision. My use of a descriptive exploratory methodology and photovoice as a data collection method has resulted in photos and participant stories about what they would like people to know about their experiences doing sex work in Lethbridge. I am able to use those photos and stories as powerful tools to pass along what was shared with me, and my hope is that by sharing participant recommendations for service expansion, some of the service agencies might hear that and services might be expanded. The service agencies I spoke to before the research were interested and enthusiastic.

Ideally, community research begins with a problem or need identified by the community; the design and implementation of the project also involves the community. The findings in that type of research often hold greater significance for the community because ownership and impetus for change already exist. In the case of this research, there is no established sex work community or group of which I am aware. In fact this

lack of community (though no single group can represent such a diverse population) is one of the things I initially recognized, and I wondered if the lack thereof might make sex work more difficult in a smaller urban area. After completion of the research, I feel it does. While isolation is prominent in much sex work literature, the lack of an established stroll for outdoor workers, and of drop in or online sex work support or advocacy services means that Women in Lethbridge operate entirely alone, unless they work for a massage parlour or with a friend. This can be physically dangerous if no one is spotting for them, and can increase emotional isolation without someone to talk to who understands the work. The lack of support services also places the onus entirely on the individual to develop precautions for physical safety and emotional protection.

The conceptualization of the research question—"What are the experiences of several women who engage in sex work in Lethbridge?"—and the research design are my own. A descriptive exploratory research methodology is appropriate because this is a researcher-driven project. The community did not set out the concept and bounds of the problem, and there is very little in the literature to give adequate background and direction, so the goal of the project is to simply explore and describe the experiences of several women who engage in sex work in a small urban centre. It is an initial step on which to build future research, to broaden the current understanding of Women's experiences across Canada.

Photovoice was a strength of this research because it was participant-led, and resulted in images that have the power to speak to audiences in a more meaningful way than words alone. This data collection method retains some of the benefits of community-driven research in that participants directed the conversation. Photovoice fit well with a descriptive exploratory design and the theoretical framework of feminist standpoint

theory and feminist intersectionality, in that it provided participants with the power to guide the research to explore their own understandings of their individual experiences. I feel that the project design worked well to address the research question. The participants made powerful, thought-provoking images that explored and described their own experiences doing sex work in this small urban area, and invoked emotion to reach audiences on a deeper level than words alone.

The conversations about participants' photos provided rich data for analysis, and resulted in three major themes in relation to the research question. The first theme, *performing identities: I'm not a whore, I'm not a slut, I'm not a skank. I'm just me,"* describes participants' construction of a sex work identity in order to perform that role. It describes how they manage that identity along with the others they have for other roles they perform, using work-specific names, clothes, and personas, and engaging in a ritual in order to move between the roles. Participants described the external factors that contributed to their construction of a sex work identity, and how they chose to accept or reject what others in their lives and society project onto them.

One significant deviation from the literature was the absence of Indigenous ethnicity as a contributing factor to participants' experiences, despite the fact that three of the participants self-identified as Métis. Indigenous Women in the larger body of literature experience greater stigma, violence, poverty, and addiction than their peers. These experiences are a legacy of cultural genocide and ongoing racialized criminal justice and social policies that serve to perpetuate the same. However, participants in this research who identified as Métis did not attribute any of their negative experiences to their ethnicity. This may be because none of these participants appeared Indigenous; often racism and the resulting negative experiences are worst for those visibly outside the

dominant group. It could also have been a self-preservation tactic, because to deny poor treatment based on their ethnicity would be to retain some of their agency.

The first theme also explained how participants managed their role as a Woman with other roles that may sometimes seem incongruent—like mother or partner. This is important because sex work literature and public discourse alike tend to reduce Women to only that single role. Recognizing that their work is only one role that Women play humanizes them and can help to reduce stigma. An acknowledgment of the difficulties of compartmentalizing their work from other roles they perform because of the stigma that sex work carries can add to the literature on self-care and support services for Women that go beyond basic needs and include wellness initiatives. Participants in this research underscored the importance of wellness and grounding practices in coping with the stress, stigma, and other negative aspects of their work and helping to balance their role at work with those they perform at home.

The second theme, *boundaries control intimacy*: *"You actually have to physically and emotionally attach yourself to a human and then detach yourself immediately after,"* described the importance participants placed on setting and maintaining boundaries with their clients in order to protect their emotional health. Boundaries were individual, and participants decided on the level of intimacy they were comfortable sharing with their clients. Their strategies for maintaining those boundaries were similarly individual, suiting the degree of separation they needed. As in the literature, participants in this research who described feeling the greatest level of choice in doing sex work and control over their workplace decisions also allowed the greatest level of intimacy with their clients and used healthier strategies to maintain their boundaries than those who felt less choice and control. They used strategies like deep acting in order to offer the intimacy

that their clients were looking for, while also maintaining some separation for their own emotional protection—bounded authenticity.

The link between having choice and implementing healthier emotional protective strategies is significant to support wellness initiatives for Women, and to inform health and social service provision in Lethbridge. As the literature suggests, while many Women choose their work and make workplace decisions to keep themselves well, others are turning to sex work because they do not have adequate health and social service support. That limited choice puts them in a more vulnerable position, which can mean that they use unhealthy coping strategies like drugs and alcohol to avoid intimacy with their clients, making them more vulnerable to violence, addiction, poverty, and homelessness.

An example of this is a patient I had at the clinic where I work. We were talking about how her drug use was escalating, and knowing that she did not do any other work, I asked if she was selling drugs or doing sex work to pay for her drug use. She answered that she had been selling a bit, but was thinking of doing some escort or webcam work. We talked about what was involved in each, about how she could keep herself healthy and safe if she chose to do either, and about wellness strategies she could employ. I was able to share important information she was not aware of, and I think it was important from a harm-reduction perspective. We also talked about other options she might have to earn money, and other support services she might access to meet her needs and to help her decrease her drug use when she was ready. Presentations from this research may encourage other health and social service providers to have similar conversations with their clients.

The final theme, *enacting agency: "For now I will do this job because I can. Fuck it,"* describes participants' roles in the structures that are in play around them, structures which are validated and perpetuated by participants' necessary interactions with them. However, their participation within these structures did not doom them to become helpless victims of perpetuation, because participants also enacted agency in their day-to-day decisions, in acts of defiance of those structures. By choosing sex work over reliance on social services, by choosing to simultaneously perform the roles of mother and partner despite the stigma that they faced as Women, by choosing and maintaining the level of intimacy they allowed their clients, by choosing workplace wellness and safety strategies despite a criminal justice system and laws that make their lives more dangerous, participants actively defied the structures that served to constrain their lives. While individual intersecting identity points also served to affect the relative amount of power each had to enact agency to make these choices, by taking the opportunities they did have, and actively making the decisions they could, participants exercised their power within the confines of those social structures and identity points.

This final theme ties together the findings from this research. Participants' decisions around their identities and roles, and about the intimacy they allowed, were a function of the agency they enacted within the structures in their lives. They used their performances to enact agency even when their choices were limited. In this research they used photovoice as a tool to dictate their stories and share what they wanted people to know about their experiences doing sex work in Lethbridge.

The publication of this thesis will contribute to my purpose of adding to the breadth of literature on Women's experiences in smaller urban centres, but that is only the beginning of KTE. I have already presented to undergraduate health and social sciences

students. I hope to continue that work as the students represent future practitioners who may work with Women one day, as well as members of the community, whose expanded knowledge about sex work may help to further dialogue and decrease stigma. I will also present to local service organizations to directly pass along participants' ideas for expanded service provision. To me, KTE is an important part of the research process, especially research done in the community. The project is small and does not represent the experiences of all Women in Lethbridge, but it is an initial step in describing and exploring some of them, and as such, it is a place for important community dialogue to begin.

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Appendix A: Criminal Code of Canada

Sections 210, 211, 213 and 286 Pertaining to Adults

Keeping common bawdy-house

210 (1) Every one who keeps a common bawdy-house is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years.

Marginal note: Landlord, inmate, etc.

(2) Every one who

> **(a)** is an inmate of a common bawdy-house,
>
> **(b)** is found, without lawful excuse, in a common bawdy-house, or
>
> **(c)** as owner, landlord, lessor, tenant, occupier, agent or otherwise having charge or control of any place, knowingly permits the place or any part thereof to be let or used for the purposes of a common bawdy-house,
>
> is guilty of an offence punishable on summary conviction.

Transporting person to bawdy-house

211 Every one who knowingly takes, transports, directs, or offers to take, transport or direct, any other person to a common bawdy-house is guilty of an offence punishable on summary conviction.

Stopping or impeding traffic

213 (1) Everyone is guilty of an offence punishable on summary conviction who, in a public place or in any place open to public view, for the purpose of offering, providing or obtaining sexual services for consideration,

> **(a)** stops or attempts to stop any motor vehicle; or
>
> **(b)** impedes the free flow of pedestrian or vehicular traffic or ingress to or egress from premises adjacent to that place.

Communicating to provide sexual services for consideration

(1.1) Everyone is guilty of an offence punishable on summary conviction who communicates with any person — for the purpose of offering or providing sexual services for consideration — in a public place, or in any place open to public view, that is or is next to a school ground, playground or daycare centre.

Definition of *public place*

(2) In this section, ***public place*** includes any place to which the public have access as of right or by invitation, express or implied, and any motor vehicle located in a public place or in any place open to public view.

286.1 (1) Everyone who, in any place, obtains for consideration, or communicates with anyone for the purpose of obtaining for consideration, the sexual services of a person is guilty of

> **(a)** an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term of not more than five years and a minimum punishment of,
>
> > **(i)** in the case where the offence is committed in a public place, or in any place open to public view, that is or is next to a park or the grounds of a school or religious institution or that is or is next to any other place where persons under the age of 18 can reasonably be expected to be present,

Material benefit from sexual services

286.2 (1) Everyone who receives a financial or other material benefit, knowing that it is obtained by or derived directly or indirectly from the commission of an offence under subsection 286.1(1), is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term of not more than 10 years.

Presumption

(3) For the purposes of subsections (1) and (2), evidence that a person lives with or is habitually in the company of a person who offers or provides sexual services for consideration is, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, proof that the person received a financial or other material benefit from those services.

Marginal note: Exception

(4) Subject to subsection (5), subsections (1) and (2) do not apply to a person who receives the benefit

(a) in the context of a legitimate living arrangement with the person from whose sexual services the benefit is derived;

(b) as a result of a legal or moral obligation of the person from whose sexual services the benefit is derived;

(c) in consideration for a service or good that they offer, on the same terms and conditions, to the general public; or

(d) in consideration for a service or good that they do not offer to the general public but that they offered or provided to the person from whose sexual services the benefit is derived, if they did not counsel or encourage that person to provide sexual services and the benefit is proportionate to the value of the service or good.

Procuring

286.3 (1) Everyone who procures a person to offer or provide sexual services for consideration or, for the purpose of facilitating an offence under subsection 286.1(1), recruits, holds, conceals or harbours a person who offers or provides sexual services for consideration, or exercises control, direction or influence over the movements of that person, is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term of not more than 14 years.

Advertising sexual services

286.4 Everyone who knowingly advertises an offer to provide sexual services for consideration is guilty of

(a) an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term of not more than five years; or

(b) an offence punishable on summary conviction and liable to imprisonment for a term of not more than 18 months.

Immunity — material benefit and advertising

286.5 (1) No person shall be prosecuted for

(a) an offence under section 286.2 if the benefit is derived from the provision of their own sexual services; or

(b) an offence under section 286.4 in relation to the advertisement of their own sexual services.

Marginal note: Immunity — aiding, abetting, etc.
(2) No person shall be prosecuted for aiding, abetting, conspiring or attempting to commit an offence under any of sections 286.1 to 286.4 or being an accessory after the fact or counselling a person to be a party to such an offence, if the offence relates to the offering or provision of their own sexual services.

Appendix B: Consent Form

Date: _____

Dear _____:

You are invited to participate in a research study on people's experiences doing sex work in Lethbridge.

This research will include two meetings. We will talk wherever you prefer. In the first meeting (about 30 minutes), we will just talk about this project and how you can use photos to tell me about your work. I will also give you a disposable camera.

Then, you can make photos that show your experiences as a sex worker in Lethbridge. I will give you a pen and notebook and you can use them to take notes or draw pictures or anything else that helps you think about the pictures you made. I do not need to see the notebook, it is just for you to use.

I will pick up the camera and develop the film (unless you want to use your own camera and just email me the photos). I will give the photos back to you either printed or by email, whichever you prefer. Then we will meet again (for about one hour) so you can tell me about your photos. If you agree, I will audio-record this talk. I will ask you to choose some of the photos that I can show other people (they will not know your name or anything else about you unless you want). You will also look at some of the photos taken by other people in the study (though you won't know their names or anything else about them unless they want). We will talk about their photos as well and what you think about them. We can meet as a group or just you and me, whatever you are more comfortable with. If we meet as a group you can use whatever name or details you want to, though another sex worker might recognize you. I will ask that everyone keep the name and details of the meeting private, but I cannot guarantee that they will. Also, if you would rather do something else besides making photos, like writing a poem or drawing a picture, you can do that too, and we will talk about it in the same way. I will never tell any service agencies, police, or anyone else that you talked to me about this study or participated in this study.

The interviews will be typed but they will NOT contain any mention of your name or any other identifying information unless you want it shared. As soon as I check that the typed interviews are correct, I will erase the audio-recordings. Your information will be kept safe. Everything from the research will be kept in a locked filing cabinet or on a password- protected computer, that only my supervisor and myself will have access to in a locked room in the university. All information will be destroyed as confidential waste after 5 years.

To say thank you, I will give you $25 after each meeting (2 meetings). You will have the chance to talk with a non-judgmental person about what it is like to do sex work. You will also be a part of a project that can help sex workers in Lethbridge by showing people what should or could change.

You can stop the meeting or withdraw from the study at any time for any reason without penalty. It will not affect any services you do, or wish to receive at any service agencies. I will destroy all of your information if you want to leave the study, and you will still keep the cash. If we talk about something sensitive and you want to talk to a counsellor afterward, I can tell you about some places that have free counselling. I can even go with you if you want. If you need any other help, like healthcare, housing or legal help, I can either tell you about free services or go with you if you want.

I will use the information from this project to write a final paper for my master's degree. I will also write papers for journals that are read by other researchers and professionals. There will be presentations to show some of the photos that you have agreed to share, and you can help me present them if you want to. The presentations will be for: health and social workers (like nurses or staff at [service agency]) to tell them about how they can give better services; police, to tell them about how they can help sex workers; the city workers, to tell them about how licensing practices can be improved, and to teach university and college students. These presentations will also be open to everyone.

I will ask you for your contact information so that I can contact you before I start writing up the papers. That way I can check that I understand what you have said properly, and that I am talking about it like you want me to. Also if you want a summary report at the end, you can let me know and I can give that to you.

If you need any information about this study, or would like to talk to my supervisor (Dr. Jean Harrowing) at the University of Lethbridge or myself (Chantelle Fitton), the contact information is below. If you have any other questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research, you may also contact the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Lethbridge, 403-329-2747 or research.services@uleth.ca.

I have read (or have been read) the above information for this research study on the experience of sex workers, and agree to participate in this study. A copy of this form has been provided to me for my records.

_____ (Printed Name)

_____ (Signature)

_____ (Date)

_____ (Researcher)

_____ (Date)

Chantelle Fitton RN, BN
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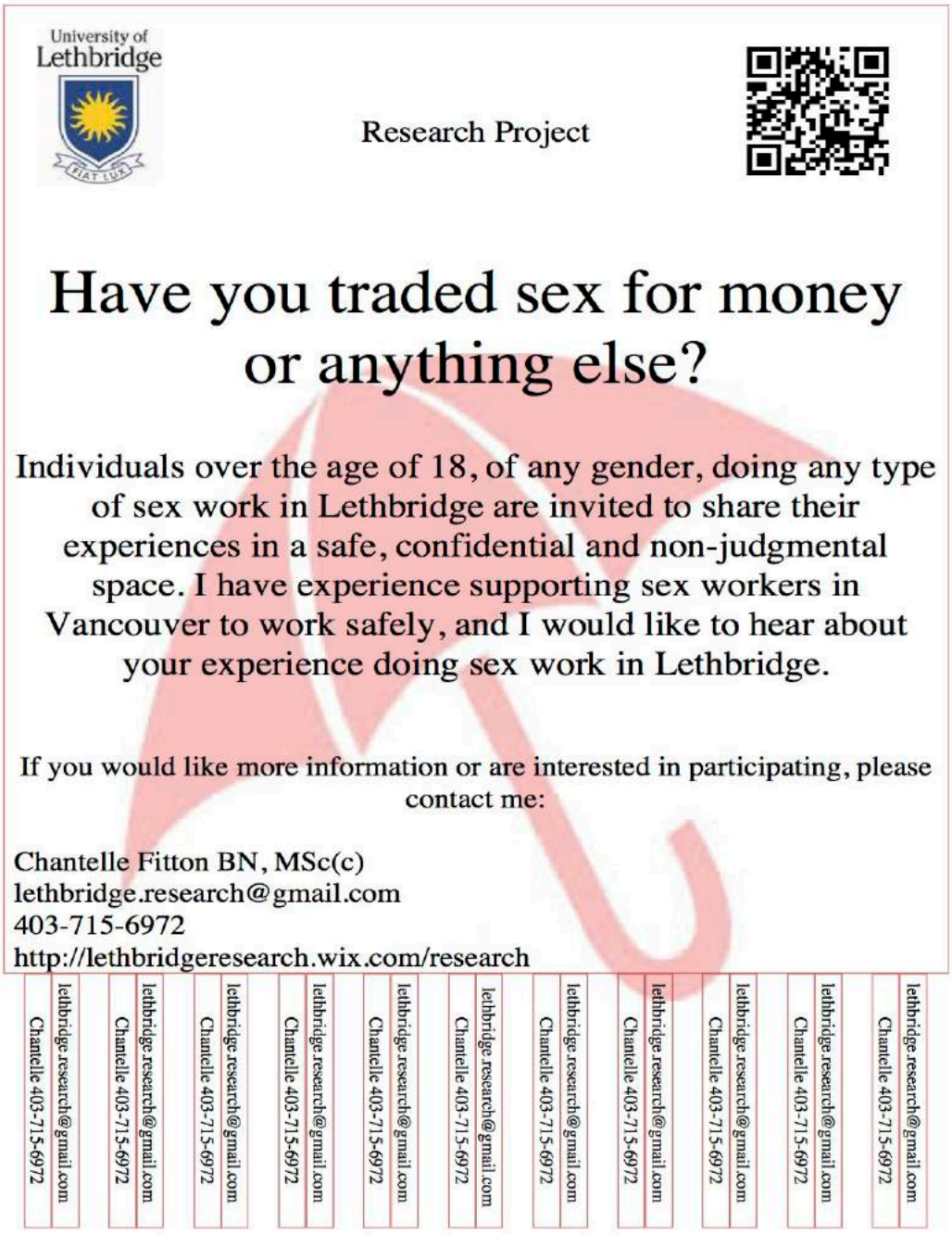
phone:403-715-6972
website: http://lethbridgeresearch.wix.com/research

Jean Harrowing, RN, PhD
email: harrjn@uleth.ca
phone: 403-394-3944

Appendix C: Poster



Appendix D: Information Sheet

Experiences of Sex Workers in Lethbridge

Who is the researcher and what is this research about?

My name is Chantelle Fitton, and I am a master's degree student at the University of Lethbridge. In the past several years I have worked as a nurse with a program for sex workers in Vancouver. I worked very closely with several sex worker community groups there that supported sex workers to work safely. My project here is about what it is like to do sex work in Lethbridge. There is other research like this in Canada, but most of it comes from bigger cities like Vancouver and Toronto. I would like to know more about what it is like to do sex work in a smaller city.

I would like to: (a) learn more about sex workers' l
ives; (b) find out what sex workers in Lethbridge need; (c) tell people the truth about what it is like to do sex work.

What is involved?

We can meet somewhere that you are comfortable, and I will tell you about the project (about 30 minutes). Then I will give you a disposable camera and ask you to make photos that represent your experiences as a sex worker in Lethbridge. I will pick up the camera and develop the film (unless you want to use your own camera and just email me the pictures). Then we will meet again (for about one hour) so you can tell me about them. I will ask you to choose some of your photos that I can show other people (they will not know your name or anything else about you unless you want). You will also look at some of the photos taken by other participants (you won't know their names or anything else about them unless they want). We will talk about their photos as well and what you think about them. We can meet as a group with other sex workers or just you and me. It is up to you.

What are the benefits and risks?

You will not benefit directly from this research. However, you will have the chance to talk with a non-judgmental person about what it is like to do sex work. You will also be a part of a project that can help sex workers in Lethbridge by showing people what should or could change. To say thank you, I will give you $25 after each meeting (2 meetings).

You can stop the meeting at any time without penalty. It will not affect any services you do, or wish to, receive at any service agencies. I will destroy all of your information if you want to leave the study, and you will still keep the cash. If we talk about something sensitive and you want to talk to a counsellor afterward, I can tell you about some places that have free counselling. I can even go with you if you want. If you need any other help, like healthcare, housing or legal help, I can either tell you about free services or go with you if you want.

What about privacy?
Meetings will be audio-recorded if you agree. When I write about what we talked about, I will use a fake name for you if you want me to. I will take out any personal information (like if you talk about a specific place or person). I will only use and share copies of photos that you agree to, and you will keep all of your own photos. Your name and personal information will never be used in this research, in the final paper or presentations unless you want me to, and I will only say things like "many of the sex workers experienced this," or "some said that." I will never tell any service agencies, police, or anyone else that you talked to me about this study or participated in this study.

When we meet to talk about your photos you can choose to meet with me in a group with other sex workers, or just with me. If we meet as a group you can give whatever name or details you want to, though another sex worker might recognize you. I will ask that everyone keep the name and details of the meeting private, but I cannot guarantee that they will.

Your information will be kept safe. Everything from the research will be kept in a locked filing cabinet that only I can open or on a password-protected computer in a locked room.

Who can participate?
Anyone who is over the age of 18, of any gender, currently doing any type of sex work in Lethbridge.

How will this research be used?
I will use the information from this project to write a final paper for my master's degree. I will also write papers for journals that are read by other researchers and professionals. There will be presentations to show some of the photos that you have agreed to share, and you can help me present them if you want to. The presentations will be for: health and social workers (like nurses or staff at the YWCA) to tell them about how they can give better services; police, to tell them about how they can help sex workers; the city workers, to tell them about how licensing practices can be improved; and to teach university and college students. These presentations will also be open to everyone.

If you have any questions about this research project, would like more information, or would like to participate, please contact:
Chantelle Fitton, RN, BN
email: lethbridge.research@gmail.com
phone: 403-715-6972
website: http://lethbridgeresearch.wix.com/research

Jean Harrowing, RN, PhD (supervisor)
email: harrjn@uleth.ca
phone: 403-394-3944

Office of Research Ethics at the University of Lethbridge
email: research.services@uleth.ca phone: 403-329-2747

Appendix E: Photovoice Tips

Thank you for participating in this research!

I would like to find out about your experiences as a sex worker in Lethbridge. I would like you to make photos that represent your experiences working as a sex worker. If you need help thinking about ideas, you can think about these questions when you are taking pictures:

- What do you think people should know about your experience as a sex worker?
- What makes your work difficult?
- What makes your work easier?
- What is the best thing about your work?
- What is the worst thing about your work?
- How does working in Lethbridge compare to other places you have worked?
- Does your work have any impact on the rest of your life?
- How do you benefit from your work?
- How do your clients benefit from coming to you?
- If you could change anything about your work, what would that be?
- How do you keep yourself safe?
- What do you do to protect your own and your clients' anonymity?
- What kind of relationships do you have with other sex workers?

Ethical considerations

- Please do not take photos that show any other people (dates, family, friends)

Tips for taking pictures

- Keep your fingers out of the camera's eye.
- When you are outside, take pictures with the sun behind you.
- Be sure to advance the film after every picture by winding the dial.
- Be sure to write down a description of the picture you took on your note pad. Don't forget to write down the number of the picture above your description.

If you have any questions or concerns with any part of this activity, or would like another camera, please contact me.

Chantelle Fitton
Phone: 403-715-6972
Email: lethbridge.research@gmail.com

Appendix F: Potential Interview Questions

1. Tell me about working in Lethbridge.
    a. Tell me about an average working day for you.
    b. What is the best thing about your work?
    c. What makes your work easier?
    d. What is the worst thing about your work?
    e. What makes your work difficult?
    f. Has it always been like this for you?
2. How does working in Lethbridge compare with other places you've worked?
3. Tell me about your strengths as a sex worker?
    a. How do you benefit from your work?
    b. How do your clients benefit from coming to you?
4. What does the word power mean to you in terms of your work?
    a. Who usually has more power on a date--you or the client?
    b. Can anything change who has the power? Can you tell me about a time when the power balance changed?
5. Tell me about the things that you do to help avoid bad dates.
    a. What are some of the other things that you have heard of people doing to avoid bad dates?
    b. Is there anything else that could help you avoid bad dates?
    c. Can you tell me about a bad date you've had? Did that change anything for you in your work?
6. Can you describe the space you work from? What makes that space safe? What would make it safer?

7. Lethbridge is a small city where people recognize and know each other. How do you handle your visibility when you are working? How do you think that affects your safety?

8. What steps do you take to protect your own privacy when you are working? What about the privacy of your clients? How do you keep your work life and your private life separate?

9. Can you tell me about your relationships or interactions with other sex workers?

10. If you could change anything about your work situation, what would it be?

11. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about?

Appendix G: Consent Form for Use of Participant Photos

I agree that the following photos or other works may be discussed in general terms in any publication or presentation of this research, and used for analysis by (please circle one option below):

The researcher and myself

The researcher, myself and other participants (other participants will not know your name or any other details about you unless you want them to).

List photo number or describe works:

_____

_____

_____

I agree that copies of the following photos or other works may be printed and discussed in detail in any publication or presentation of this research (your name and other details about you will not be shared unless you want them shared).

List photo number or describe other work:

_____

_____

_____

_____ (Printed Name) _____ (Date)

_____ (Signature)

_____ (Signature of Researcher) _____ (Date)